



WESTERN  
MEDITERRANEAN  
1942-1945





*Photo: J. Russell & Sons, London*

**ADMIRAL OF THE FLEET**

**VISCOUNT CUNNINGHAM OF HYNDHOPE**

**K.T., G.C.B., O.M., D.S.O., D.C.L., LL.D.**

WESTERN  
MEDITERRANEAN  
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By

TAFFRAIL

CAPTAIN TAPRELL DORLING  
D.S.O., F.R.HIST.S., ROYAL NAVY



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DEDICATED TO  
TWO ALLIED NAVAL COMMANDERS-IN-CHIEF,  
ADMIRAL OF THE FLEET VISCOUNT  
CUNNINGHAM OF HYNDHOPE,  
AND  
ADMIRAL SIR JOHN CUNNINGHAM,  
EQUALLY TO  
ADMIRAL H. KENT HEWITT, UNITED STATES NAVY,  
WHO WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR  
THE DIRECTION AND COMMAND  
OF THE SHIPS OF THE ROYAL AND  
UNITED STATES NAVIES IN THE  
MEDITERRANEAN  
FROM NOVEMBER, 1942, UNTIL MAY, 1945.  
ALSO TO THE OFFICERS, MEN  
AND WOMEN OF ALL THE ALLIED NAVAL  
SERVICES, AFLOAT OR ASHORE, WHO,  
UNDER SUCH INSPIRING LEADERSHIP,  
WORKED DEVOTEDLY AND WITH ALL  
THEIR STRENGTH DURING THIRTY  
MONTHS OF INCESSANT STRAIN AND  
NAVAL ACTIVITY, IN FIGHTING OR IN  
SUPPLYING THE ALLIED ARMIES OR AIR  
FORCES, FOR THE FURTHERANCE  
OF THE ALLIED VICTORY IN  
THE MEDITERRANEAN.

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ADMIRAL SIR JOHN CUNNINGHAM  
G.C.B., M.V.O.

## CHAPTER I

WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN  
1942-1943

ON New Year's Day, 1943, from Allied Force Headquarters at Algiers, the Naval Commander, Expeditionary Force, Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham (now Admiral of the Fleet Viscount Cunningham of Hyndhope) sent a message to the officers and men of the Allied merchant navies. In giving them his good wishes, he said that when victory came it would be due in no small measure to the courage and tenacity with which the merchant vessels of the Allied nations had kept the sea in face of continued and savage attack. In particular, the Admiral paid tribute to the work of those ships which had taken part in the recent operation in North Africa: "Many examples have been brought to my notice of bravery, devotion and skill, which has only added to the admiration I already have for the work you have performed." He added: "Navy, Army and Air Force alike know how much they depend on your efforts. May success prosper those efforts in the coming year."

Sir Andrew Cunningham was promoted to Admiral of the Fleet on January 21st, 1943, and on February 20th relinquished his title as Naval Commander, Expeditionary Force, and became for the second time Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean.

In the following October, after the illness of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound, which ended in his death, Sir Andrew was called to the Admiralty as First Sea Lord, to be relieved as Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, by Admiral Sir John Cunningham, lately Commander-in-Chief, Levant.

At the time Sir Andrew's message was promulgated to the merchant navies on January 1st, 1943, few of us on the spot

realized how much would have been accomplished in the Western Mediterranean in the course of the next twelve months. What actually was done was summarized in the departing Commander-in-Chief's farewell message of October 17th, 1943, which was broadcast to all concerned before he left for England:

"I leave you all in the Mediterranean with keen regret, but also with pride," he said. "It has been my privilege for the last year to command a great fleet of ships of the Allied nations of every category from battleships to the smallest craft. We may well look back with satisfaction to the work which has been performed. You have caused grievous discomfiture to the enemy. You have carried hundreds of thousands of men and millions of tons of supplies. You have taken a vital part in throwing the enemy out of Africa, in the capture of Sicily and, finally, in the invasion of Italy and the re-entry of the United Nations to the mainland of Europe. It is a high achievement of which you may well be proud. To you all who have fought and endured with such courage, tenacity and determination I send my heartfelt thanks and appreciation. We have still far to go, but I know well that the spirit of our countries, as I have seen it in those whom I have had the honour to command, will carry us through to the day when we can return to enjoy the blessings of the land with the fruits of our labours."

Indeed, much more had been accomplished than could conveniently be summarized in a signalled message. Apart from the defeat and surrender of the Axis army in Tunisia, the invasion and occupation of Sicily, and the landing of Allied troops at various places on the mainland of Italy, Italy had surrendered and her fleet was in Allied hands. On October 2nd, 1943, after the desperate fighting for the narrow beaches in the Gulf of Salerno, where naval gunfire played so vital a part in ensuring the Army's first foothold and forwarding its subsequent advance, the battered part of Naples was in Allied hands. It was urgently required for the supply of the armies, destined, after fighting as severe as any of the war, to advance to Rome and beyond. Yet when Naples was occupied, not one

berth alongside was available for the use of the essential shipping. Extensive damage had been done by the Allied bombing aimed at impeding the flow of supplies to the Axis army in Tunisia. Still more devastation had been caused by the systematic and ingenious sabotage of the retreating Germans. Wharves and jetties had been demolished, ships sunk alongside, and dockside cranes and buildings blown into the water. The shore exits were choked with the rubble of more shattered buildings, and the harbour area was littered with wrecks and débris. The sea approaches to the port were heavily mined, as many of the buildings ashore were booby-trapped. The city was without electric power or water, and typhus and other diseases were spreading. More will be said later of the part played by the Navy in the opening of the port of Naples. It was really an inter-Allied commitment in which the Navy and Army both shared; but whereas on October 2nd, 1943, not one berth was available alongside, in January, 1944, Naples and its satellite ports were handling more cargo than any other port in the world. New York came second.

From November, 1942, onwards there were no major naval actions in the Western Mediterranean. Much to everybody's regret, the Italian fleet, numerically superior to the Allied fleet, did not choose to give battle. Yet for two and a half years, until the end of the war with Germany, the Allied Navies were constantly in action.

Until May, 1943, there were those cruiser and destroyer strikes against the enemy convoys using the Sicilian Channel for the supply of the Axis army in Tunisia. The submarines of the flotillas based upon Algiers and Malta were used for the same purpose, and gave valiant service in circumstances of extreme hazard. For more than twenty months there were always the enemy's U-boats to threaten our shipping, with their aircraft for some time after that. There were frequent naval bombardments in support of the Army, in which battleships sometimes took a hand. Minesweeping was incessant, and our light coastal forces of motor-torpedo-boats and motor gunboats were constantly engaged. Apart from

their work during the Tunisian and Sicilian campaigns, their principal targets were the heavily-armed and protected enemy convoys stealing by night up and down the east and west coasts of Italy, as well as in the Gulf of Genoa and among the Dalmatian Islands on the eastern side of the Adriatic, that network of islands and tortuous inner leads stretching for more than 200 miles from Pola in the north to Dubrovnik in the south. Landing ships and the many different types of landing craft all played their vital part and had their full share of adventures, as did the ubiquitous motor launches, the boom defence vessels, the rescue tugs and scores of anonymous small craft.

The primary tasks of the Navy in the Western Mediterranean during the last thirty-one months of the war against Germany were the support of the Army and the carriage of "hundreds of thousands of men and millions of tons of supplies," likewise for the Army. But in cutting the enemy's supply lines by sea and engaging his forces wherever they were to be found, the Navy's role in the Western Mediterranean remained offensive until the end of the war in Europe.

A large number of books, and millions of words in newspapers and magazines, have been written about the campaigns in North Africa, Sicily and Italy. Still more has been broadcast. But most of the accounts of the professional news-gatherers dealt with the day-to-day fighting of the Army and the work of the Air Force; very few with the more mundane and less spectacular work of the Allied Navies and Merchant Navies. This was more or less taken for granted.

It is true that, except on the rarest occasions, the operations of the sea Services do not lend themselves to publicity. There is so much which has to be kept secret for the time being lest valuable information be given to the enemy. For instance, the quantities of stores put ashore under fire on a beach-head like Anzio could not be mentioned, in case it gave an approximate indication of the number of troops landed. Similarly, and greatly to the exasperation of newspaper correspondents, we could not publish the news of the sinking of enemy submarines,

and how, when or where they had happened, in case the enemy discovered the methods we were using. The same ban applied to the losses of, or damage to, our own warships or merchantmen. A hundred and one subjects were taboo. It was frequently and acrimoniously said that the Navy was altogether too secretive, greatly to the detriment of its own publicity. Dozens of good "stories" might be held up by the censorship until their news value had gone.

The German broadcasts in English were rigorously combed for news items. It often happened that they published some account of, say, a naval engagement in which they claimed to have inflicted fantastic losses. Besieged by the correspondents, we would be asked if the German claims were true, and, if not, why we did not deny them and issue a statement giving the real facts and figures. The answer was, of course, that this was the very thing the enemy wished us to do. His wild exaggerations were frequently put out as bait in the hope that we might publish information that he really wanted to know.

All the same, the news-gatherers were not responsible for running the war, and some innocent-looking remark might quite well give gratuitous information to the enemy and thereby jeopardize the success of an operation or the lives of men. There was no sense in telling the Germans something they might not know, so a great deal of what might have been hot news had often to be suppressed, or told "off the record." To their everlasting credit, the great mass of Allied correspondents stifled their natural indignation and eventually came to understand the naval difficulties. But whatsoever they felt, whatever they knew *sub rosa*, they invariably played the game and never abused a confidence.

There were other limitations. A correspondent on board a warship during an operation could not as a rule be permitted the use of the ship's radio. For one thing, there might be wireless silence, when the touching of a Morse key might result in the ship being pin-pointed by radio-location and attacked by enemy aircraft or submarines. Moreover, during any considerable operation like the landings in Sicily, or at

Salerno or Anzio, the ether was so congested with operational messages that no time could be found for Press despatches or even for short news flashes. In consequence, the correspondent at sea was denied the facilities enjoyed by his confrère on shore, who could usually have his messages censored and transmitted on the spot with the minimum of delay. Unable to send his news as it occurred, the correspondent embarked in a ship had to content himself by writing eyewitness feature stories which had to be sent ashore for censorship, and might not appear in print for several days. At times this created a certain amount of acrimony. One correspondent's ship might reach harbour before another, which meant that the first man in might make a "scoop" while the work of all the others would be killed stone dead. Efforts were made to guard against this; but it was not always possible. The movements of ships during an operation are unpredictable, for the unexpected usually happens. One might be back in harbour in twenty-four hours; others might be out for five or seven days. Were the first stories to be held up until all had arrived at the place of censorship and transmission, or were they to be released individually on arrival? Whatever method was adopted, someone was certain to be offended.

The ideal would have been to give all correspondents the freedom of the ship's radio, which was done to a very limited extent later. Even so circumstances did not permit a long despatch to a newspaper being sent off in code. It had to be transmitted in plain language, which meant it must be censored before being put on the air. On occasion twenty or more writing correspondents, apart from broadcasters, photographers and cinematographers, might be embarked in twenty different ships—battleships, cruisers, destroyers or landing ships or craft. Trained censors did not exist in quantity. If twenty different officers had been appointed as temporary Press censors over and above their normal duties, the results would have been chaotic. Some would have been too lax and others too free with the blue pencil, thereby causing more annoyance on the score of discrimination.

Strange things sometimes happen in the matter of censorship. At the beginning of the war, in the Ministry of Information, a journalist came to me for material to write something on convoys. I advised him to read the article "Convoy" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th Edition. This he did, only to have his work ruthlessly cut and censored. I had to add my protests to those of the journalist and to show the censors Volume 5 of the *Encyclopaedia* before the article could be published as written.

Naval Press censorship must be systematic and consistent to be effective. It is an acquired art. Trouble would have occurred, and sometimes did, if the Press censors in, say, Malta, Algiers and Alexandria did not see eye to eye, or if they suppressed the sort of information that was being passed in London or Washington, or *vice versa*. American ideas on naval Press censorship did not always coincide with our own until we came to a working agreement. And in the early days in North Africa the French authorities in Algiers were not easy to deal with. Some articles were not submitted for censorship until after they had appeared in the local newspapers, others were far too drastically cut and mutilated. The same sort of thing occurred in Italy after that country surrendered and became a "co-belligerent."

It was not always realized by the uninitiated that political censorship could not be exercised by the Navy or Army, and that criticism or fair comment could not be stifled. To have done so would have interfered with the freedom of the Press and created much trouble. Press censorship only existed to prevent the enemy from knowing what it might be valuable to him to know—that is, for security. Newspapers vary in their presentation of news. Moreover, what some people might consider bad taste, or even a travesty of the real facts, was not liable to censorship unless it involved a breach of security. Naval censors never wilfully mutilated a correspondent's copy and left it a tattered remnant. Most of them went out of their way to be helpful, explaining why this or that could not be allowed to pass and suggesting some alternative wording.



One remembers the naval Press censor who received a mild wiggling for allowing a correspondent to mention the fact that a certain distinguished naval officer directed a bombardment from the bridge of his cruiser in the heat of the Mediterranean summer wearing a panama hat and a pair of grey flannel trousers. It was contrary to the Uniform Regulations, no doubt; but the correspondent had considered his remark as a good homely touch. When called to book by his superior, the censor could only observe that the S.N.O.'s grey flannels and panama were at least comfortable, and did not jeopardize the success of the operation or give valuable information to the enemy.

To show the vicissitudes of correspondents afloat, there was the case of the well-known representative of a large American news agency who was anxious to go to sea in one of His Majesty's ships for the Salerno operations. Fighter cover over the ships and beaches was partly provided by the naval aircraft from a force of assault-carriers under the orders of Rear-Admiral Sir Philip Vian in the cruiser *Euryalus*. "Force V," as it was called, was to operate north of Sicily well out at sea, and the work promised to be sufficiently novel to be interesting. With Rear-Admiral Vian's permission, the correspondent was sent to the *Euryalus*, and for the reasons already given it was explained to him that he would have to content himself by writing feature stories which might not get ashore for several days. On the other hand, it was probable that motor launches would be plying between "Force V" and Palermo, where arrangements had been made with the American Army Public Relations' Officer to collect any despatches coming in from the sea and to send them on to Malta for censorship and transmission.

For several days the correspondent wrote assiduously. Then he heard that a motor launch had arrived with mails and letters and would presently return to Palermo. For some reason, the M.L. could not come alongside the *Euryalus*, so the correspondent was advised to seal up his despatches in a smoke float container, a tin cylinder about 18 inches long. He

could drop this overboard to be picked up by the M.L. All this part of the drill was perfect. It was only when the container was handed over to an officer at Palermo that disaster occurred. Never having seen such a thing before the recipient was filled with suspicion. He convinced himself that the innocent receptacle was a new type of enemy time bomb intended to dispose of him and the office building in which he worked. Being a very cautious man, he sent it to the bomb disposal officer, who lost no time in blowing it to the four winds of heaven with the despatches still inside it.

These facts did not come to light until several days later, when the American Army Public Relations' Officer at Allied Force Headquarters agitatedly rang up the British Naval P.R.O. on the staff of the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean:

"What's this you've been doing to destroy the Anglo-American alliance?" he asked.

"Mercy!" groaned the naval P.R.O. "What's happened now?"

"Only that the Consolidated Press of America, which serves maybe eight hundred newspapers all over the American continent, has lodged an official complaint with the Navy Department at Washington to say that the British Naval Censorship is holding up all American Naval Correspondents' despatches."

"Hell!" said the Naval P.R.O., declining all responsibility for such an outrage. He would investigate, and find out what had happened. It took some days before the facts came to light and the Royal Navy was exonerated from all blame. That incident just emphasizes the sort of disabilities to which the best of our naval correspondents were sometimes subject.

One is reminded of a correspondent of a totally different type, a versatile gentleman in khaki. Sitting at his desk at Algiers, he would write dramatic eye-witness stories of the bombardment of Pantellaria, or the fighting in Tunisia and on the Sicilian beaches. Nothing came amiss to his ready typewriter and his vivid imagination. He would write of incidents hundreds of miles apart on two successive days.

Everything came as grist to his mill. His efforts excited the ribald admiration of his confrères, who christened him "The Knight of the Flying Carpet." The stories, harmless enough in themselves, could not be censored. They gave no information to the enemy.

Then there was another correspondent, who was anxious to write a piece about minesweeping, which he had heard was somewhat risky. Applying to the Naval P.R.O. he was given facilities to visit one of the motor minesweepers, which at that time were busy sweeping for magnetic mines off Algiers. He boarded the vessel early in the morning, only to discover that the bad weather had prevented all minesweeping for the day. But the Navy behaved with its traditional hospitality. It refused to let its guest go—entertained him to breakfast and lunch, with liquid sustenance when the sun was over the fore-yard. In the meantime he was told what happened when a mine detonated in the sweep—how the ship shuddered as the whitish-grey column of smoke and spray burst shimmering into the air, how the cups in the wardroom pantry leapt off their hooks, and the cook's dentures fell into the ship's company's soup, how terribly dangerous it all was. It is to be feared that the officers of that little ship rather laid on the thrills with a trowel, for, coming ashore in the afternoon, that correspondent wrote a whale of a yarn which was printed on the lead page of his newspaper. It earned him the cabled congratulations of his editor for a first-class story, and, on the same day, a cable from his wife—"Please, darling, don't take such risks."

But taking everything into account, it is not surprising that many correspondents regarded it as waste of time to go to sea in His Majesty's ships. Naval war, as someone once said, consists of long periods of intense monotony punctuated by moments of hectic excitement. If a correspondent did happen to be afloat in an action which resulted in the loss or damage to one of our own ships or the sinking of an enemy submarine, the facts could not be mentioned. Cruiser and destroyer bombardments, all very much alike, soon ceased to have any

news value, as did such matters as minesweeping and the carriage of troops and their supplies. The daily communiqué issued at Allied Force Headquarters, which included all three Services—British, American and sometimes French—was not supposed to exceed 200 to 300 words. It was terse, merely mentioning that the Army had reached such and such a river, or captured a ridge or a village, after severe fighting; that the Air Force had bombed certain targets with good results; that ships of the Allied Navies had bombarded enemy positions or troop concentrations in support of the Army, or that light coastal craft had attacked and sunk an enemy convoy. The rest of the news was given to the correspondents at A.F.H.Q. in the form of background material, in which the Navy was handicapped through not being able to provide the exciting day-to-day news stories provided by the Air Force. The ships were constantly at sea and at work; but so much of what they did was unspectacular. If something newsworthy did occur at sea, full accounts of what had happened were not usually available until the ships concerned returned to harbour. The story might be written up in haste and given to the Press in the form of a "hand-out," though an incident that had happened several days before stood little chance of being useful, except possibly to the broadcasters and the few correspondents who wrote feature articles.

The Mediterranean was a long way from England. Considering all the facts and the tremendous events that were happening all over the world, it is not altogether surprising that the work of the Allied Navies in the Western Mediterranean received so little attention in the attenuated British Press. Bits and pieces, and an occasional article, appeared here and there; but they gave little real indication of the vitally important part that sea power played in three campaigns in North Africa, Sicily and Italy, not to mention the invasion of Southern France, our entry into the Ægean and the liberation of Greece, and dozens of less important side-shows like the capture of Elba and the operations in the Gulf of Genoa and the Adriatic.

No one person can write of all that the Navies did in the Western Mediterranean during those thirty-one eventful months from November, 1942, to May, 1945. Nevertheless, the story deserves to be told in so far as one observer can tell it. The tale can never be complete; but it is partly to correct the rather popular impression that the Mediterranean eventually relapsed into an unimportant and uninteresting naval backwater that this book came to be written.

## CHAPTER II

## NORTH AFRICA

## I

ENOUGH has been written of the Allied landings at Casablanca, Oran and Algiers on November 8th, 1942; of the political situation with the French in North Africa, and the assassination of Admiral Darlan. Still more is on record about the operations of the First and Eighth Armies in Tunisia, and the final surrender of the Axis Army in the Cape Bon peninsula on May 12th, 1943. It is with the sea side of the Tunisian campaign, the task confronting the Naval Commander-in-Chief, or the Naval Commander, Expeditionary Force, which was Sir Andrew Cunningham's title until February 20th, 1943, that we are primarily concerned.

It is sufficiently well known that for various good reasons, largely political, the Supreme Command of the Allied Expeditionary Force was vested in an American, Lieutenant-General Dwight D. Eisenhower. From the point of view of rank, Sir Andrew Cunningham was senior to the Supreme Commander. This made not the slightest difference. General and Admiral, with their respective staffs working together as a team, had been closely associated during the planning stages in England. The relationship had been continued at Gibraltar during the actual landings and their consolidation.

At Algiers, where Allied Force Headquarters were transferred in mid-November, it was pleasant and interesting to see in the somewhat congested rooms of the Hotel St. Georges British and American officers working side by side on the same jobs in complete unity of purpose and understanding, which soon ripened into cordiality and friendship. This feeling of comradeship started from on high and extended to officers of all ranks.

Sir Andrew Cunningham we already knew as a prime seaman, a hard fighter, and a leader who had the supreme trust and confidence of those who served under his command. We knew his record of war service from the days he had fought in the Boer War as a midshipman of the cruiser *Doris*, through the War of 1914-18, where he had served with great distinction in command of destroyers and had earned a triple D.S.O., to the dark period of 1940-1, when, as Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, after Italy's entry into the war, he had held the Eastern Mediterranean with a fleet greatly inferior to the Italian. His lack of ships was more than made up by the boldness and vigour with which he used them and the aggressive spirit of his officers and men. We knew of the battle off Calabria, where the Italian battleships ran like scalded cats to the cover of their shore-based aircraft; of the crippling of those Italian ships at Taranto by the cold-blooded gallantry of the naval aircraft from the *Illustrious* and *Eagle*; and of that pitiful holocaust at night now known as the Battle of Matapan, where three Italian cruisers were blasted into blazing ruin by battleships at point-blank range. We had read and heard of those many cruiser and destroyer actions in which the Italians were worsted; of the work of the submarines on Rommel's supply line, and of the task of the Navy, particularly its little ships, in support of the Eighth Army in the desert and the succour of the garrison of Tobruk.

Most painful had been the work of evacuating the Army from Greece and Crete in May and June, 1941, virtually without air cover and in the full weight of the venomous and concentrated attacks of the *Luftwaffe*. That had resulted in the loss of sorely-needed ships and their still more valuable men. Only Sir Andrew's closest friends knew what was in his heart at this most difficult juncture, a situation which provided one of the most heartrending ordeals through which the Royal Navy has ever passed. His signals, many of which have become legendary, sometimes gave a glimmering of what he really felt. But a short extract from his despatch dealing with the evacuation from Greece and Crete shows it better still:

"It is not easy to convey how heavy was the strain that men and ships sustained. Apart from the cumulative effect of prolonged seagoing over extended periods, it has to be remembered that in this last instance ships' companies had none of the inspiration of battle with the enemy to bear them up. Instead, they had the unceasing anxiety of the task of trying to bring away in safety thousands of their own countrymen, many of whom were in an exhausted and dispirited condition, in ships necessarily so overcrowded that even when there was an opportunity to relax conditions made this impossible. They had started the evacuation already overtired, and they had to carry it through under conditions of savage air attack such as had only recently caused grievous losses in the Fleet. There is rightly little credit or glory to be expected in these operations of retreat, but I feel that the spirit of tenacity shown by those who took part should not go unrecorded."

Tough, terse and outwardly unemotional, the Admiral did not wear his heart upon his coat sleeve. He was a disciplinarian. Some people alleged that he modelled himself upon that dour old martinet, the Earl of St. Vincent, the Admiral who had caused mutineers to be hanged on the Sabbath in the fleet blockading Cadiz in 1797, and four years previously had written to a young officer who had served with him and whom he thought had married, but had not: "Sir,—You having thought fit to take to yourself a wife, are to look for no further attentions from—your humble servant, J. Jervis."

Lord St. Vincent's letters and utterances were always blistering and trenchant when he suspected incompetence or indolence. "Your letter," he wrote to one captain when Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Fleet in 1800, "... has not contributed in the smallest degree to alter the opinion I had formed of your having determined to avail yourself of the influenza to get the — again into port." And to another: "A few sheets of copper off a frigate's bottom is not a sufficient ground for remaining a day in port." Again, in 1806, when once more Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Fleet at the age of seventy-one: "There is a great lack of seamanship in



the Service, and the young people now coming up are for the most part frippery and gimcrack. I wish we could revive the old school." Had they been deserved, which they were not, one might almost imagine those remarks being made by the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, in the early part of 1943.

"Old Jarvie's" courtesy was frigid, and he spared neither himself nor others. As First Lord of the Admiralty at the age of sixty-six, his usual hours of audience were from 5 until 7 a.m. After his retirement, he was up and prowling around his little estate at Rochetts soon after dawn, and expected his male guests to rise at six. The ladies were suffered to remain in bed until later.

Nevertheless, though there were occasions when even Lord St. Vincent mellowed sufficiently to show a certain gruff humour, with consideration and generosity, to those who served him well, the comparison between him and Sir Andrew Cunningham cannot really be sustained. Those of us who really knew our naval leader in the Mediterranean were aware of his sympathy and understanding. Himself fiercely energetic and untiring, he expected the same from others. He was strict in the matter of uniform, and in his heart of hearts disliked the white shorts and shirts which the regulations permitted to be worn as "tropical rig" in hot weather. Any naval officer who appeared in khaki without very good reason incurred the Commander-in-Chief's outspoken displeasure and was denounced as being dressed as a something soldier. In hot weather, Sir Andrew himself never appeared in anything but immaculate "full whites," with long trousers and high-collared white tunic.

One sunny forenoon at Algiers, when the Admiral had an hour to spare, he decided to walk round the dockyard to see the work in progress. Arriving unheralded in his car with the flag lieutenant, he started his rapid perambulation, noticing everything, as was his habit. Turning at right angles round the corner of a building he came upon an able seaman in dirty overalls and sea-boots lolling indolently asprawl upon sacks of

potatoes he had drawn for his ship, with the small handcart nearby. It was a very hot morning, and the sailor, a somewhat obese pensioner, was feeling his age. His cap was tilted over his eyes. He was all but asleep.

History relates that he saw the Admiral's sudden approach; but that his presence of mind failed him. Judging he had no time to spring smartly to attention and salute, as the occasion demanded, fearful also of being reprimanded for his slovenly attire, which was contrary to all orders, the A.B., his heart fluttering, decided to remain where he was, hoping he would not be noticed.

The C.-in-C., however, missed nothing. The flag lieutenant was directed to take the sailor's name and ship. This was done, and a signal made to the delinquent's ship, which was a mine-sweeper:

"Commander-in-Chief to *Rothsay*. It is observed that Able Seaman Brown considers the correct manner of receiving his Commander-in-Chief is in a recumbent attitude upon sacks of vegetables, improperly dressed."

The signal called for no reply, but brought the captain of the *Rothsay* hot-foot to apologize in person. He did not see the Commander-in-Chief, but was told by someone in authority not to take the incident to heart. The *Rothsay's* fine mine-sweeping record covered a multitude of peccadilloes.

The Commander-in-Chief was severe on occasion, particularly against anything approaching slackness, inefficiency or bad seamanship. But his rebukes, always deserved, never rankled. One remembers the case of an officer who was a liaison officer with another service during some operation or other. His typewritten report was detailed and voluminous, and rather erred on the side of enhancing his own value: "It's time this young officer scrapped his typewriter and went to sea" was the C.-in-C.'s comment.

It was his personal courage and obstinate tenacity, the offensive spirit and boldness of action which this great sailor inculcated and inspired in all his subordinates that made him so trusted and famous. No flag officer, no cruiser, destroyer or

small ship captain could do wrong if he attacked and fought, even against heavy odds. It was not in the nature of things that they should always succeed; but more often than not they achieved the impossible. Whatever happened, the Commander-in-Chief would back them up if they had followed the modern interpretation of Nelson's precept of laying their ships alongside the enemy.

Yet with it all Sir Andrew Cunningham's tastes were essentially simple. He did not glory in battle or in being a great naval leader. When promoted to Admiral of the Fleet, luck, he said, had been on his side all the way through his career, and he did not know how he had got away with it. He was certain he committed as many naval "sins" as others who had fallen by the wayside.

He had no ostentation and detested publicity, so much so that it was never easy to induce him to interview journalists. One remembers the Naval Public Relations officer asking if he would see a persistent French lady journalist who wished to write him up for a magazine with a very large circulation.

"Must I?" the C.-in-C. asked with reluctance in his voice.

"Well, sir," was the reply. "It would be a good idea if we put it over to the French what the Navy's really doing."

"Very well, then," said the C.-in-C., looking at his engagement book. "If you say so, I suppose I'd better, though I hate all this sort of stuff. Have her here at eleven-thirty on Thursday. I'll give her ten minutes."

The lady duly appeared—perfumed, made-up, high-heeled, elaborately coiffured. She was ushered into the presence, and the P.R.O. retired. Knowing the lady's journalistic habits and volubility, he returned in nine minutes and filched her away.

"Phew!" said the C.-in-C. when the visitor had finally left the premises. "Never bring me any more like that, P.R.O. My room'll stink for a fortnight. D'you want people to take me for a pansy?" It was a cold day, with a fire burning in the grate. All the windows had been flung open.

He never really liked interviewing the Press in mass, though he realized good came out of it.

"Well, gentlemen," he would begin, sitting at his desk with the great chart of the Mediterranean on the wall behind him. "I've nothing much to tell you, except that the Navy's still hard at it. What is it you'd particularly like to know?"

Someone from the twenty or thirty people present would ask a question, and there would follow an unrehearsed and lucid explanation of the whole complex campaign as it affected the Navy, some of which had necessarily to be "off the record." Those conferences did good. The C-in-C. always had an appreciative audience and a good Press.

And, touching his simplicity, one remembers a journalist saying, in so many words: "Well, Admiral, I suppose you'll be sorry in a way when all this is over?"

"Sorry?" the C-in-C. returned. "That's just where you make your mistake. I'm longing for the day when I can go back to growing my roses in the country, and playing golf and fishing when I feel like it." He spoke in all sincerity.

However, if the biography of Admiral of the Fleet Viscount Cunningham of Hyndhope, K.T., G.C.B., D.S.O., LL.D., ever comes to be written, it will be said that one of the finest periods in his long naval career was when, with a handful of ships, he retained that control of the Eastern Mediterranean at a time when Britain was fighting single-handed with her back to the wall. These were some of the most critical months in the whole record of the Royal Navy. One trembles to think of the results if the control of the sea had been lost. It would have meant the surrender of Malta and the Axis occupation of Egypt and the Suez Canal. After that, what?

If at that difficult time Cunningham and his men soon had the measure of the Italians, the Italians lost no time in forming their opinion of the Royal Navy and in behaving accordingly. In Rome in October, 1944, I met a much-decorated senior naval officer of the Italian Navy, who was as anxious to discuss the war at sea as I was to avoid a subject I thought would be painful to him. We conversed in French.

"But what *could* we do against the invincible British Navy?" he asked apologetically, shrugging his shoulders and gesticulating

in the Italian manner. "We had more ships, it is true. But our ships and our men, well"—and he made a wry grimace—"they are not as yours. No. The British methods, too, they are so unorthodox. When by all the rules they must run away, they do not! It is we who must run. You comprehend," he added as an afterthought, "we cannot spare the oil to go very far. The British do not allow it."

I was interested to hear these additional reasons for the liquidation of the Italian Fleet as a fighting force. That Italian officer's *naïveté* was refreshing, particularly his remark about what he evidently regarded as British churlishness in not allowing Italy a fair share of the oil fuel! What he really meant, of course, was that Sir Andrew Cunningham's meagre fleet had done the impossible, as indeed it had. It was a pleasure to hear that from an ex-enemy who was now a "co-belligerent." I also found myself wondering how the course of history might have been altered if the League of Nations had been a league of all the nations, and oil sanctions had been exerted against Italy during her unprovoked aggression against Abyssinia in 1935.

This digression, however, has taken me some distance from Allied Force Headquarters at Algiers towards the end of 1942.

To those of us who had not met him before in London or Gibraltar, our Supreme Commander, General Eisenhower, was an unknown quantity, a vague and shadowy figure of whom we had heard plenty but knew nothing at first hand. But the first time one saw him and heard him speak one realized that all one had heard was true. He was a man of outstanding personal charm, quick perception and human understanding and kindness. He suffered no fools gladly, and was ruthless in checking anything approaching acrimony or intolerance between the British and American members of his numerous staff, many of whom were learning each other's methods for the first time in a situation and surroundings that were both novel. Americans and British must get together and keep together. They were in North Africa for a common object and must work as a team. If anyone put sand in the machinery, there were others to replace him.

We lesser fry did not meet the General every day. We saw him only from time to time. Always approachable, he was inflexible in his determination to succeed in the onerous and difficult task of welding the British and American Armies, Navies and Air Forces into one combined fighting force for the common object of defeating the Axis. They were separately commanded; but their ultimate direction was his. It was perhaps an experiment—certainly the first time that an American general had been placed in supreme command of British armies in the field, and of the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force as well. It suffices for me to say that General Eisenhower, supported as he was, soon had our respect and admiration. He was a prime co-ordinator and a great American. As events so amply proved, he was the very best choice his great country could have made. It was in North Africa that he first proved himself and earned the loyalty and, if I may say it, the personal affection and gratitude of the British.

British and American methods certainly differed—the British sometimes striving to make ends meet with an insufficiency of ships, men, supplies and material; the Americans, according to British ideas, lavish almost to the point of extravagance. One noticed it in many directions. The American ships were fitted with laundries and other amenities which our ships never possessed. Their sailors and soldiers were more generously clothed, fed, paid and cared for. While we laboured under the austerity of three years of war, the Americans, with all the resources and industries of a continent behind them, enjoyed abundance.

Until we learned to follow their example, the American welfare services, notably the American Red Cross, complete with its cinemas, writing-rooms, bathrooms, barbers' shops, restaurants and dance halls, provided recreational and other facilities far superior to our own. The Americans seemed to have requisitioned all the dry-cleaning establishments, the laundries, and the tailoring and boot-repairing shops for the benefit of their officers and men at economic rates. We had to get on as best we could, usually by paying black market prices.

The American transport, from the large staff cars used by senior officers to the profusion of jeeps which seemed to be at the disposal of nearly every G.I., excited our envy and admiration. It seemed a little strange that most senior British officers, naval, military and Air Force, habitually used high-powered American cars. Most of the British naval officers of the rank of captain and below depended for their locomotion either upon requisitioned French vehicles of varying stages of decrepitude, with French drivers, or upon a motor transport pool consisting in the main of museum pieces long past the age of redemption. How often were the unfortunate users confronted with the news, accompanied by suitable gesticulation: "*Hélas! Le voiture ne marche plus.*"

It was surprising that some of the ancient creaks ever "marched" at all; running on threadbare tyres which could not be replaced, vomiting oil and steam, their brakes alternately useless and seizing, their chattering valves and knocking engines beat a wild tattoo against the rattling cacophony of their scarred and dented wings and bodies. Transport was always one of our chief difficulties. A.F.H.Q. at the Hotel St. Georges, up the winding Rue Michelet, with its trams, trolley buses and teeming military traffic of every kind, was between three and four miles from the port of Algiers. The Naval Barracks in the Lycée Nationale, and the three hotels in which most of the shore-going naval officers lived, the Aletti, the Terminus and the Regence, were not far short of the same distance. The Press and the Allied Public Relations' set-up had their headquarters in the Maison D'Agriculture, not far from the port, while various branches or sections of A.F.H.Q. were scattered all over the city. With its narrow, densely crowded streets and pavements, Algiers was not an easy place in which to move around. Those few of us who lived in billets were luckier than most.

Algiers presented one of the strangest conglomerations of people I ever saw. Apart from the indigenous population of locally-born French, with the teeming Arabs, Moors and other races common to most Mediterranean coast towns, there were

many French—some said 100,000—who had come there as refugees from metropolitan France since 1940.

The city was full of British and American troops. One saw officers and men of the Royal Navy in their white cap covers, with a sprinkling of the R.A.F. There were French sailors with the red pompoms on their caps, with the French Colonial Army much in evidence—Zouaves, Chasseurs d'Afrique, Tirailleurs, Senegalese, and occasionally a little troop of Spahis, with their red cloaks, mounted on white Arab chargers: sometimes a little group of young Frenchmen wearing the green beret and "plus fours" of the "Chantiers de Jeunesse."

The sunlit pavements were crowded with this diverse collection, with, in the better parts of the town, a fair number of Frenchwomen. They wore the most impertinent of fashionable hats, and, in spite of more than two years of severe clothes' rationing under Axis requisitioning, still contrived to look as smart and soignée as though dressed from the Rue de la Paix. Their neatness was in distinct contrast to that of some of the Arab women in their long once-white robes, with only their eyes showing above the white veils worn over their mouths and noses.

The streets and wide boulevards, lined with trees, were busy with traffic. There were sleek British or American official cars with mystic letters and numbers on their windscreens, American jeeps in profusion, requisitioned charabancs, and all the varieties of motor vehicles used by modern mechanized armies. There were trolley buses, and tramcars with three cars linked together which delayed all other traffic. With all these were mingled the heavily-laden native carts drawn by three skinny horses pulling abreast; the mule-drawn "camions" of the French Colonial Army; the donkey carts and man-drawn barrows laden with oranges, vegetables, flowers, furniture and heaven knew what. One noticed that all the draught animals were woefully thin.

For more than two years a rapacious Axis Armistice Commission had requisitioned everything worth taking, and without payment. The local wine was exported because its alcohol



content was useful for some war purpose. The oranges, which one saw piled high on the market barrows, being peddled by Arabs, laden into Allied ships for export, and being eaten by all and sundry in the streets, were exported to Germany and Italy. The corn was taken, and so was the olive oil. French North Africa was denuded of all the food and merchandise useful to the war machine or for the sustenance of our enemies.

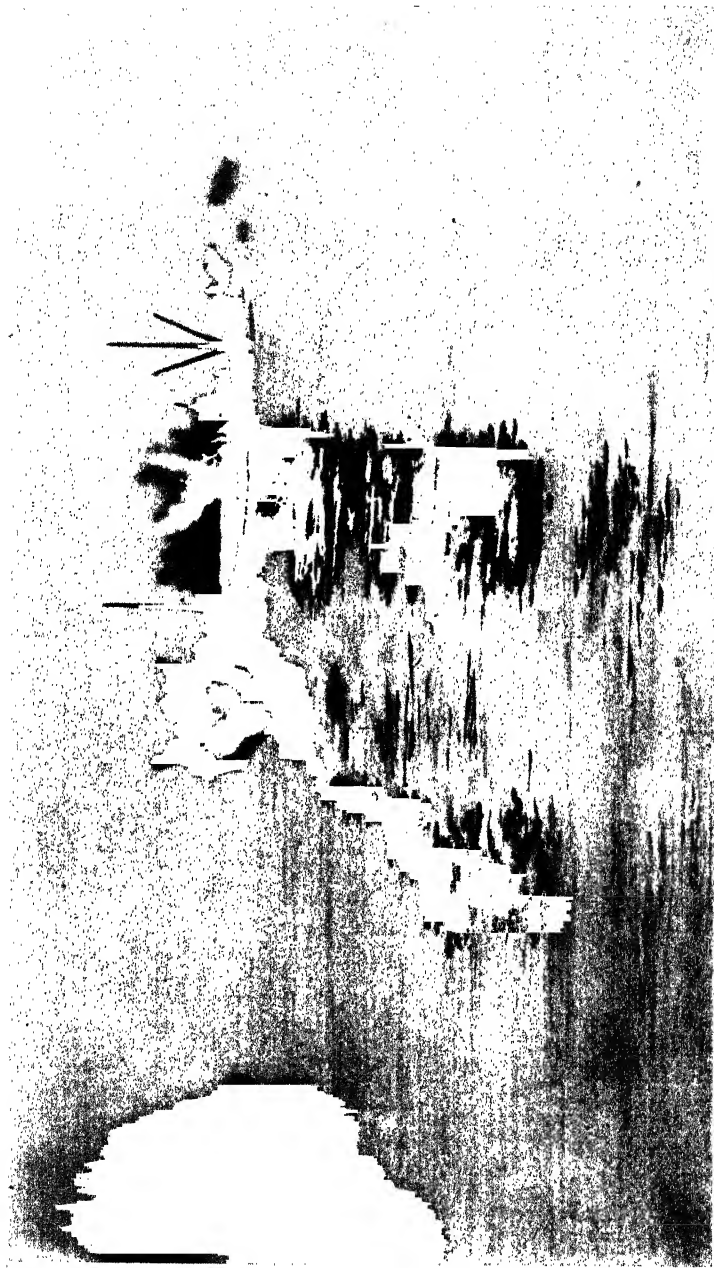
Algiers is a beautifully laid-out town stretching up into the naturally wooded hillsides, with fine, Moorish-looking buildings, tall blocks of modern flats and offices, and many large houses, or "villas," standing in their own gardens. Most of the buildings are white or the colour of rich cream. There are palms and flowering shrubs, many species of pines to which I cannot give a name, strange cacti, flowering reddish-mauve bougainvillea and yellow mimosa, orange trees and lemon trees. On cloudless days the sky is almost unbelievably blue.

It had its music-hall. I never visited it; but in the newspaper advertisements one noticed that the programme included a "gracious Hindu dancer," a "wild jungle man," a "talented singer," some acrobats and "Les 8 casino girls"! There were cinemas in plenty, showing, among other films, *Mr. Smith au Sénat* (*Mr. Smith goes to Washington*), *Vogues*, 1938 and *Laurel and Hardy au Far-West* (*Les rois de rire*).

The many fine shops showed signs of former prosperity—prosperity destroyed by the Axis tutelage. However, Americans and British spent freely upon such things as could be bought. Before long not a bottle of scent or a lipstick remained.

In coming to North Africa, the Allied Forces were entirely self-supporting in the matters of food and supplies. What is more, they were supplying fuel for the railways and power plants, while large quantities of goods, mainly provisions, were imported and presented to the local population. Some of the things were distributed with more generosity than sense. Corned beef and tinned milk given to the Arabs, who never touched such things, found its way into the black market and were sold to the French at enormous prices. The *marché noir* prospered exceedingly. Cigarettes, soap, matches, toothpaste





A ship of a Tunisia-bound Axis Convoy, already on fire, being engaged by a British Cruiser.

and other commodities, procurable only at the Allied canteens, changed hands for much money, with the Arabs usually acting as go-betweens. One even heard of uniform clothing and footwear being bartered for untold sums, while, in spite of the strict supervision, Allied petrol found its way into the black market through the rascality of some of the locally enlisted Service drivers. Miles out in the mountains a French person of my acquaintance even found a jeep in a remote farmstead. The farmer had acquired it for a dozen bottles of local wine, and was keeping it hidden until after the war.

Méanwhile, in Algiers itself one saw sailors and soldiers on leave walking decorously abroad with French girls, and heard of lonely men who had been adopted by French families. The great bulk of the people seemed genuinely pleased to see us. Our French rapidly improved, and for those of us who knew no French at all there were always the lessons in one of the French weekly papers, like this: "*Traverser la rue*"—"To cross the street"—"*Tou crosse de strite.*" "*Faites attention aux voitures ou vous allez vous faire ecraser*"—"Pay attention to the cars or you will be slandered"—"*Pai attention to the cars or iou vouil bi slandeured.*"

It was good advice, though one presumes the translator meant "slaughtered"!

## II

The North African campaign remained amphibious until the surrender of the Axis forces in Tunisia on May 12th, 1943, and the part played by the Navy was vital to success. In conjunction with those sections of the Air Force which operated over the sea it had two main functions, that of safeguarding the passage of reinforcements and supplies to the Army and Air Force operating on shore, and of employing all the means at its disposal to interrupt the passage of seaborne supplies to the Axis army in Tunisia.

The Naval Commander-in-Chief had many problems. The Italian battle-fleet was divided between Taranto and Spezia. "Force H," under the command of Vice-Admiral Sir Neville

Syfret, and including the battleships *Nelson* and *Rodney*, with the aircraft-carrier *Formidable* and a number of destroyers, was kept at Gibraltar or Mers el Kebir (Oran), with frequent sweeps to the north-east towards the Balearic Islands and an occasional visit to Algiers. It was unwise to risk heavy ships within easy bombing range of the enemy's shore-based aircraft in Sardinia or Sicily unless there was a prospect of contact with the enemy's capital ships, which it was known the Italians were reluctant to face. At the same time, "Force H" provided the core of all the other naval forces in the Western Mediterranean, and the ultimate covering force for the large number of lighter vessels engaged in protecting the convoys east through the Straits of Gibraltar and along the Algerian coast.

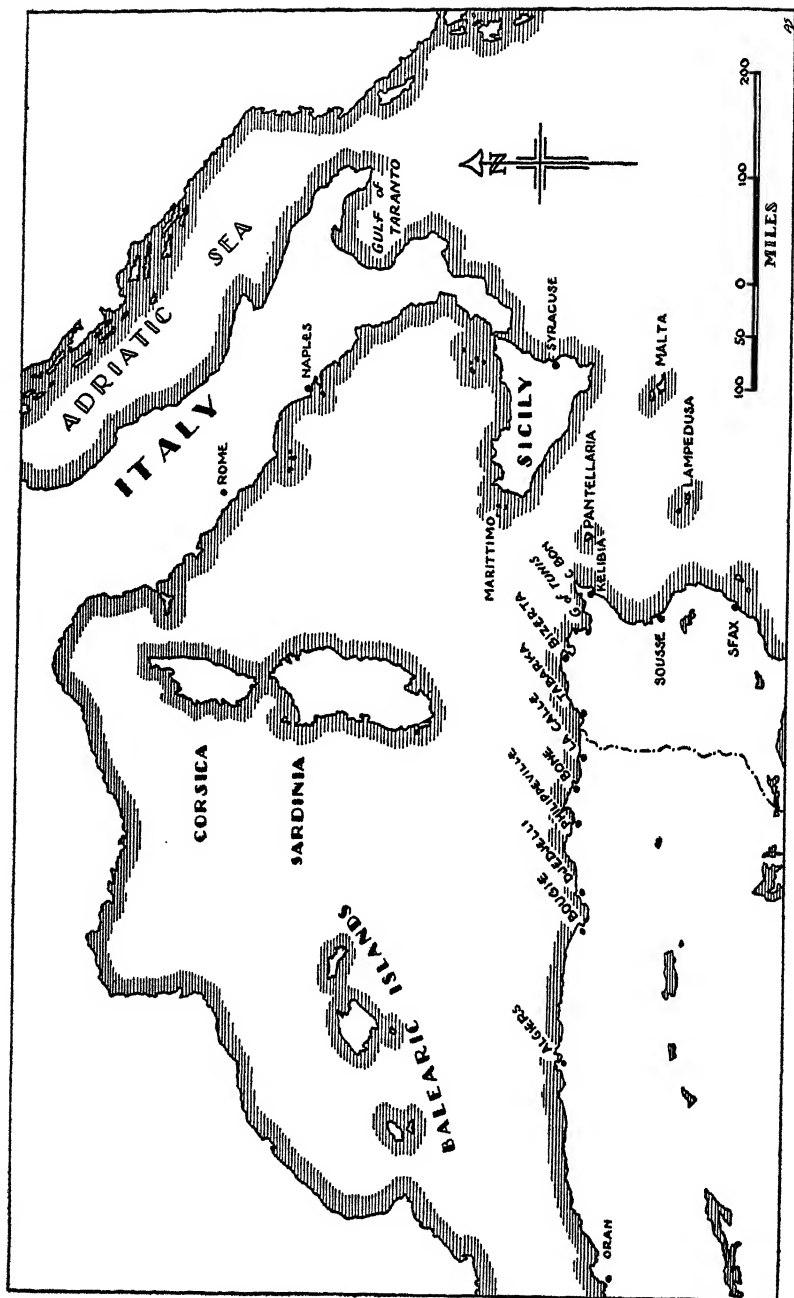
Cover for our sea-borne supplies forward from Oran and Algiers had normally to be provided by "Force Q," of cruisers and destroyers, usually divided between Algiers and Bone. These same ships, with other destroyers from Malta, were used for frequent strikes against the enemy's supply line across the Sicilian Channel. Submarines from Malta were used for the same purpose, while those of the flotilla based at Algiers early in December, 1942, were employed against enemy shipping in the Tyrrhenian Sea and further north in the Gulf of Genoa.

In the matter of supply, a clearer picture is presented if the North African campaign is dealt with as a whole. In the period November 8th, 1942, to May 8th, 1943, a total of more than 11,000,000 gross tons of Allied merchant shipping bringing men and supplies from the United States and Great Britain entered the occupied ports of North Africa, including Casablanca. Since the traffic moved both ways, the tonnage actually escorted was more than 22,000,000. Both in the Atlantic and along the 800 miles of the North African coast east of Gibraltar the convoys and their escorts were subject to the constant danger of U-boat attack, and towards the Central Mediterranean to air attack as well. Enemy mine-fields were also laid off various ports. The loss in merchant ships through all these three causes during the six months was 2.16 per cent. of the total tonnage escorted.

The onus of protecting this huge volume of shipping fell upon the destroyers, corvettes and other escort craft of the Allied Navies working in close co-operation with the Air Force. Their work was strenuous and incessant. The enemy was known to be using a large concentration of U-boats. Contacts and sightings were frequent. Thanks, however, to the vigilance of the escorts, no less than to the patrols and cover for convoys provided by the Air Force, and light naval craft working off-shore, the enemy was never able seriously to interfere with the passage of our essential convoys. In the Western Mediterranean and the Atlantic approaches under the command of the Naval Commander-in-Chief, in the six months of November, 1942 to May, 1943, sea and air forces combined sank more than twenty enemy submarines, with many more listed as "probably sunk" or "severely damaged." One notable success was achieved by the Dutch submarine *Dolfijn* during her working-up cruise in the Mediterranean, when she sank an Italian U-boat on February 9th, 1943. Three "kills" on January 13th, 19th and February 8th were made respectively by the Canadian corvettes *Ville de Quebec*, *Port Arthur* and *Regina*, which, with other corvettes of the Royal Canadian Navy, gave valuable service as convoy escorts. Details of some of our successes against U-boats will be given later.

Bougie and Djedjelli, approximately 130 and 170 miles east of Algiers, respectively, were occupied on November 11th and 12th, and landing-craft bases established there during January. Philippeville, seventy miles east of Djedjelli as the bird flies, was in use by November 19th, while Bone, some fifty miles east of Philippeville, became the main supply base for the First Army on November 12th, and the headquarters of the Senior Officer, Inshore Squadron, Commodore Geoffrey Oliver, early in December.

The Commodore's "parish" extended for hundreds of miles from Bougie to Tabarka, and inland to First Army Headquarters at Constantine. Road transport for the Navy in this forward area was a speculative concern for the first few months, with heavy calls upon the overworked but ever-helpful



THE WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN.

# NORTH AFRICA

R.E.M.E. depot and workshop. Until one reliable car was secured from the Army, the stud of ancient French cars rarely failed to drive home the truth of R. L. Stevenson's dictum that—"it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive."

The following figures showing the deadweight tonnage of supplies, personnel and vehicles, including guns and tanks, landed in Casablanca and the North African ports in the period November 8th to December 31st, 1942, are interesting as showing the rate of build-up by sea during the first seven weeks:

<i>Port.</i>	<i>Dead-weight tons discharged</i>	<i>Personnel</i>	<i>Vehicles</i>
Casablanca	38,000	80,000	9,400
Oran	290,675	90,296	9,847
Algiers	248,048	123,559	14,746
Bougie	51,500	16,500	2,300
Philippeville	56,000	92,000	1,600
Bone (November 24th—December 31st)	86,053	31,085	4,491
	770,276	433,440	42,384

Oran was under American control; but at Algiers, from the date of the first landing to April 30th, 1943, 390 ocean-going steamers disembarked men and discharged some 1,000,000 tons of stores and supplies. These included large quantities of food, some of it for the local French population, some 300,000 tons of petrol, lubricant and other oils, 150,000 tons of coal, principally for the French railways and public utility services, about 100,000 tons of ammunition, and some 30,000 vehicles, including tanks. On February 4th, 1943, there were eighty merchant ships, laden or empty, in the port of Algiers, the largest concentration of shipping since the landing.



The loading and unloading of vessels remained a military responsibility, and local Arab labour had to be enrolled for the purpose. It was satisfactory up to a point, though not during air raids, while pilferage became a fine art. Nevertheless, towards the end of the Tunisian campaign it was possible for Algiers to discharge about 14,000 tons of cargo in a single day, a tribute to those responsible.

The port remained throughout under the command of Commodore (later Rear-Admiral) J. A. V. Morse, who, with his tact, urbanity and quiet determination and drive, was a tower of strength in conditions that were sometimes very difficult, and quite one of the best unofficial ambassadors that Britain ever had. His flair for getting on with all and sundry was proverbial, and he certainly got the best out of the varied team which served under him in a somewhat thankless job.

As in every other port, the berthing and movement of shipping was entirely a naval responsibility. So was the extended naval defence, and the passive protection against surface or submarine attack in the shape of nets, booms and other obstructions. The local minesweeping came under the Navy, as did the routing of convoys, the provision of tugs, the supply of fuel, water and provisions, and the docking and repair of damaged vessels with what facilities and labour were available. Much had to be extended and improvised to provide for a far greater number of warships and merchant vessels than the port of Algiers had ever been designed to accommodate. The work was often hampered by air raids and mines laid from aircraft. That all these and other difficulties were successfully overcome was an achievement which contributed greatly to our final success in Tunisia.

One cannot pretend that the air raids were comparable with those of London during the Blitz of 1940-41. All the same, they were sufficiently noisy and frightening, particularly to the Arab population. The heavens were criss-crossed with the waving beams of searchlights and dotted with the sparkle of shell-bursts. The lower atmosphere was streaked with streams

of red and white tracer. Every gun in the place opened fire, and there were many.

Writing about air raids reminds me of a tale that has probably been told before. On June 4th, 1943, during an Old Etonian dinner at the Inter-Allied Club at Algiers, there was a particularly spectacular air raid. Some journalist mentioned it in a despatch to his newspaper, remarking that the Navy had put up a remarkable firework display on behalf of the Old Etonians. This evoked a question to the First Lord of the Admiralty in the House of Commons as to why the Navy was wasting public money in celebrating the function, and the Commander-in-Chief was asked for an explanation. His reply was characteristic. He mentioned the occasion of the dinner, and added: "During the raid those dining were treated to a spectacular rocket display when the projectors were fired, an officer present being heard to remark in appreciative tones on the firework display so kindly arranged for their festival by the Navy. It is regretted that the exigencies of war should have thus given colour to the idea that Government support was being given to the activities of this nefarious sect," i.e. the Old Etonians. "Should it be considered of sufficient importance to justify the waste of time and effort," the answer continued, "I can, of course, continue my enquiries throughout all the ports in North Africa, in which case perhaps the Honourable Member will furnish more details as to place. I am, however, of the opinion that the explanation given above is the basis of the story, and that the Honourable Member's informant must also have been celebrating."

We heard no more of the matter.

But I have diverged again.

Bone, as has been said, was the main supply port for the First Army. Because it was a smaller port which for a time suffered from almost incessant air raids, its problems were far more acute than those at Algiers. Partly because transport by sea is always more rapid and economical than transport by road or by rail; partly because the Algerian roads were inadequate for a huge mass of heavy Army traffic and the single-line

railways were execrable, with an acute shortage of rolling stock, coastwise shipping was necessary for carrying forward supplies and reinforcements. The enemy had the local air superiority for the time being, and the savagery of the bombing attacks and our losses very soon showed that it was unprofitable to risk large personnel ships anywhere east of Algiers. The task therefore fell upon smaller vessels, and convoys escorted by destroyers and other naval craft sailed eastward from Algiers once every fourteen days until the end of the Tunisian campaign. One remembers that over a period of seven weeks, during the worst of the bombing, some 128,000 tons of supplies were discharged at Bone, and 4,000 tons of food and petrol reloaded and carried forward in naval landing craft to the smaller ports of La Calle and Tabarka. The shipping at Bone was always heavily bombed, and each convoy from Algiers had to be fought through.

Because the large personnel ships could not be unnecessarily risked, the shuttle service for troops between Algiers and Bone was undertaken by four small ships of the Royal Navy. Originally built as fast cross-Channel steamers, they are referred to in the Official reports as "L.S.I.(M.)"—Landing Ships Infantry (Medium). Their names are worthy to be mentioned: H.M.S.'s, *Queen Emma* (Captain G. L. D. Gibbs), *Princess Beatrix* (Commander T. B. Brunton), *Royal Ulsterman* (Lieutenant-Commander W. R. K. Clark, R.N.R.), and *Royal Scotsman* (Lieutenant-Commander J. D. Armstrong, R.N.R.). Carrying some 3,300 troops on every trip, these four vessels had transported 16,000 men to Bone by December 5th. Between December 13th and February 13th they carried another 36,000. Almost always under air attack, and occasionally under U-boat attack as well, the steady procession of their voyages continued until late in March, when the *Royal Ulsterman* and *Royal Scotsman* returned to England for other duties. Their strenuous use and devoted service greatly speeded the turn-around of shipping.

The imperturbable Captain Gibbs of the *Queen Emma* was a contemporary of Sir Andrew Cunningham's. I remember

being in the port of Algiers when the *Emma* and *Beatrix*, beautifully handled as ever, came in astern through the crowded harbour and secured stern first to the jetty. They both brought prisoners of war, Germans, Italians and others of foreign nationality forced to fight for the Nazis, a scruffy, sorry-looking lot. After being received on board at Bone, they were always medically inspected by the ships' doctors. While this was going on with this particular bunch, there started a heavy daylight air raid, with guns roaring and bombs whistling down and exploding close enough to shake the ship. The medical officer, not quite liking it, dived under the sick bay table. The German who was being examined, well over six feet tall and stark naked, raised his hand in the Nazi salute and shouted, "*Heil Hitler.*" Gibbs, in his whimsical way, asked me what I thought a British Tommy or an American G.I. would have said in similar circumstances. It would have been something rather more pungent, I imagined, than "Long live Churchill!" or "God bless Roosevelt!"

With the four ships just mentioned, the tank-landing ships H.M.S.'s, *Bachaquero*, *Misao* and *Tasajera* are also to be remembered, as is the ferry steamer S.S. *Empire Dace*. The *Tasajera* was damaged by a torpedo from an enemy aircraft on January 17th. All these ships were regularly employed in transporting tanks, guns, vehicles and military personnel from Oran to Philippeville and Bone, and, as regularly, were attacked by enemy aircraft. Two small tankers of the Merchant Navy, the *Empire Bairn* and *Empire Gawain*, also gave outstanding service in carrying petrol and fuel to the same destinations.

The air attacks on Bone occurred almost daily during November. On the night of the 27th-28th there was continuous bombing for five and a half hours, and the destroyer *Ithuriel* was badly hit. But more and more of the enemy aircraft were being shot down by fighters and the gunfire from ships, so that in December the attacks became less frequent. With occasional sharp recrudescences, however, they continued off and on until May.

One particularly bad raid took place when Bone was heavily

bombed before dawn on December 4th, and again from 8 p.m. on the 4th to 4 a.m. on the 5th. The quays and jetties at the time were congested with shell and petrol. There were bad fires, with extensive losses of stores and ammunition, while fifty soldiers were killed and others wounded. There was another concentrated daylight attack on New Year's Day, 1943, when the cruiser *Ajax*, which had just joined after an extensive refit after being damaged in the Eastern Mediterranean, was again bombed and severely damaged. Three merchant vessels were also hit, though the damage to one was only superficial. Another sharp attack took place during daylight on January 2nd, the *Ajax* being near-missed without further damage. The minesweeper *Alarm*, however, had her back broken and had to be beached, while four merchant ships were hit and caught fire. Two, one of which carried petrol, became total losses.

But Bone was still the main supply port upon which the First Army depended, and the base from which operated our striking force of cruisers and destroyers, known as "Force Q." It was under the command of Rear-Admiral C. H. J. Harcourt, with his flag in the cruiser *Aurora*, and consisted from time to time, so far as my memory serves, of the cruisers *Penelope*, *Argonaut*, *Sirius*, *Ajax* and *Dido*, with, among others, the destroyers *Quality*, *Quiberon*, *Quentin*, *Eskimo*, *Ashanti*, *Tartar*, *Laforey*, *Lightning*, *Lookout* and *Loyal*. Some of these ships, with the names of their commanding officers, will be referred to later.

At one period doubts were expressed as to the wisdom of keeping the cruisers at Bone under heavy bombardment from the air. The intensity of the attacks, however, showed the importance the enemy attached to removing this threat to their sea communications between Sicily and Tunisia. The decision was difficult; but, hardening his heart, the Commander-in-Chief came to the conclusion that they must stay. Soon after the *Ajax* incident, he signalled to the Senior Officer of "Force Q" at Bone to stick it out. He knew the ships were having an unpleasant time, but if they withdrew they

would be playing the enemy's game. Improved defences were being sent.

So the ships and seamen of the Royal and Merchant Navies, with the port parties and docks operating personnel, stuck it out and carried on. It was to these men and their fortitude, more perhaps than to any other, that the First Army was indebted for the sinews of war which ensured its final victory.

It was about midway through December, too, that the enemy sought to add to the difficulties at Bone by using aircraft and E-boats to lay mines in the approaches. These hostile activities were curtailed by the regular night patrols of our light coastal craft, while a battery provided with the guns of the damaged destroyer *Ithuriel* was mounted on shore. Before New Year's Day, 1943, minesweepers had successfully disposed of forty-five enemy mines.

## CHAPTER III

## ACTION

## I

WHILE the carriage of reinforcements and supplies continued, we struck hard, with all the means at our disposal, at the enemy's vital supply line across the Sicilian Channel, as well as at his ports used for loading and unloading.

Mention has already been made of "Force Q," of cruisers and destroyers, which was stationed at Bone at the end of November as soon as airfields had been prepared and fighter cover established. Success came almost immediately.

On December 1st an enemy convoy on its way to North Africa, located by air reconnaissance, was attacked by a British submarine, which, after inflicting damage, had been forced to dive on being counter-attacked by enemy motor torpedo-boats. "Force Q," consisting of the cruisers *Aurora* (Captain W. G. Agnew), *Argonaut* (Captain E. W. L. Longley-Cook), *Sirius* (Captain P. W. B. Brooking), with the destroyers *Quentin* (Lieutenant-Commander A. P. N. Noble) and H.M.A.S. *Quiberon* (Commander H. W. S. Browning, R.N.), the whole under the command of Rear-Admiral C. H. J. Harcourt with his flag in the *Aurora*, was at sea. About half an hour after midnight on December 1st-2nd, "Force Q" fell upon this same convoy off the Gulf of Tunis, and for the enemy it was a holocaust. Engaged at point-blank range, four supply ships or transports and three destroyers were sunk or set on fire. Eye-witnesses spoke of the devastating effects of the close-range gunfire—of ships exploding and bursting into flames amidst clouds of smoke and steam; of motor vehicles carried on deck seen tumbling into the sea as vessels capsized; of frantic men throwing themselves overboard as their ships

went down. It is impossible to say how many men the enemy lost, or what quantities of motor transport, fuel, and supplies failed to reach Tunisia on that occasion, but not one ship survived. Submarines on the scene next morning reported large areas of sea covered in thick oil with masses of floating debris and numbers of floating corpses in lifebelts. Our forces suffered no damage during the action, though on the return to Bone at early dawn the destroyer *Quentin* was torpedoed and sunk by enemy aircraft. The bulk of her crew was rescued by her sister ship, H.M.A.S. *Quiberon*, under heavy bombing. "Well done everybody," signalled Admiral Harcourt after this engagement. "I think we have helped the First Army."

On the return journey from a similar expedition in the middle of December the cruiser *Argonaut* was twice torpedoed by enemy aircraft and severely damaged. She arrived at Algiers with portions of her bow and stern blow away; but, by some miracle, with her engines and screws working, though the rudder was useless. She finally left under her own steam, to cross the Atlantic for repairs at the Navy Yard at Philadelphia.

With the enemy air superiority, it was apparent that the triangle of water between the Gulf of Tunis, Sardinia and Sicily was no place for surface ships during daylight. Their strikes had to take place at night, the daytime attacks on enemy shipping being undertaken by submarines, of whose outstanding work more will be said later.

Destroyers from Bone and Malta, however, carried out frequent night strikes against the enemy's supply line across the Sicilian Channel and in the approaches to Tunis, Biserta, Sousse and Sfax until the end of the campaign. It is impossible to chronicle each and every incident and engagement; but apart from the ships already mentioned the following were among the destroyers that participated: *Eskimo* (Captain J. W. Eaton), *Ashanti* (Commander R. G. Onslow), *Tartar* (Commander St. J. R. J. Tyrwhitt), *Nubian* (Commander D. E. Holland-Martin), *Pathfinder* (Commander E. A. Gibbs), *Paladin* (Lieutenant-Commander L. St. J. Rich), *Penn*



(Lieutenant-Commander J. H. Swain), *Petard* (Lieutenant-Commander R. C. Egan), *Laforey* (Captain R. M. J. Hutton), *Lightning* (Commander H. G. Walters), *Lookout* (Lieutenant-Commander A. G. Forman), *Loyal* (Lieutenant-Commander H. E. F. Tweedie).

Orders from Allied Force Headquarters forbade the mention of units in the official communiqués, and this applied also to the names of ships. The naval communiqués, too, had to be unimaginatively laconic, and that of January 18th, 1943, compiled from the first radio reports of the operation, was a fair example: "On the night of January 17th-18th, British destroyers operating on the Axis supply line between Sardinia and Tunisia sank an enemy merchantman of about 3,000 tons. Her cargo exploded. Our ships, which suffered no casualties or damage, have since returned to their base."

Had some correspondent been on board one of those destroyers this incident might have made a good story. As it was, the communiqué received scant notice in the Press.

The destroyer strikes were supplemented by those of the motor torpedo-boats and motor gunboats operating from Bone and Malta. The success of the earliest of these night expeditions imposed daylight passages on the enemy convoys, though at first we lacked sufficient air power to reap full advantage of the fact. Aircraft of the Naval Air Arm Squadrons, 821, 826 and 828 from Bone and Malta were used for anti-shiping strikes to the full limit of their capacity, and with some success. However, it was not until March, 1943, that the formation of a Coastal Air Force provided the aircraft necessary for regular shipping sweeps in addition to the bombers used for attacking the enemy's loading ports and previously located convoys.

The gallant and hazardous work of the submarines will be dealt with later; but all the other naval offensive measures were intensified by minelaying at night in the Sicilian Channel as well as in the approaches to Bizerta and Tunis. Minefields were laid by H.M. submarine *Rorqual*, and by the minelaying cruisers *Abdiel*, *Manxman* and *Welshman*, which latter was

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torpedoed by a U-boat and sunk with heavy loss of life on February 1st while on passage between Alexandria and Malta. The bulk of the minelaying, however, was carried out by H.M.S. *Abdiel* (Captain David Orr-Ewing), which between the end of January and April 7th, 1943, laid eight minefields between Sicily and the Gulf of Tunis. The *Abdiel* operated at night without escorts in previously mined waters bereft of the usual navigational safeguards and patrolled by enemy aircraft, submarines and E-boats. She steamed to the laying area at high speed, and her expeditions were always hazardous, so much so that a sigh of relief went round the Operations Room at Algiers when the news came through that she had completed her lay and was well on the way home. On one occasion her operation had to be postponed because she was shadowed by aircraft and sighted by E-boats. On others she was narrowly missed by two torpedoes from a submarine, and was in action with a group of E-boats.

The minelaying programme was supplemented in February by adapting some of the motor torpedo-boats at Bone to carry a limited number of American mines, technical assistance and advice being given by Lieutenant-Commander Kremer, U.S.N. Their first successful lay, close inshore off Bizerta, took place on the night of February 22nd-23rd. Their daring work continued for many weeks in an area regularly patrolled by enemy aircraft and coastal craft. They had various adventures, and on one occasion were engaged by three E-boats after getting rid of their mines. Glad of the diversion, they engaged the enemy, leaving one ablaze and the other two firing into each other. Though it is impossible to say what shipping losses the enemy sustained in these minefields, there is no doubt that they added greatly to the risks incurred by his convoys and the difficult problem of supplying the Axis forces in Tunisia.

In all, in the six months of the campaign, our surface forces sank twenty-three supply ships or transports approximating to 56,500 tons, five destroyers or torpedo-boats, one E-boat, with a large number of landing craft and smaller vessels.

Including the losses inflicted by the submarines, only one out of every three ships leaving Italy succeeded in reaching Tunisia.

## II

Immediately the first landings in North Africa had been consolidated, British submarines were concentrated in the approaches to Tunis and Bizerta. The enemy's air power and ability to concentrate his anti-submarine forces, not to mention the numerous minefields, made the task of our submarines difficult and extremely hazardous. Their first successes caused early and acute anxiety to the enemy for the safety of his convoys and coastal traffic. The boats in the Western Mediterranean ranged over a wide area, from Sardinia to the eastern shore of the Tyrrhenian sea, and the Riviera to Tunisia.

Their story must eventually be told in detail, with the names of all their commanding officers. Indeed, the tale has already been written in part in *His Majesty's Submarines*, prepared for the Admiralty by the Ministry of Information and published by His Majesty's Stationery Office.

The parent ship of the 8th Submarine Flotilla at Algiers was H.M.S. *Maidstone*, her captain, Captain G. B. H. Fawkes, being also in command of the flotilla. The submarines attached to her during the Tunisian campaign were *Safari*, *Sahib*, *Saracen*, *Seraph*, *Sibyl*, *Splendid*, *Taurus*, *Thunderbolt*, *Tigris*, *Torbay*, *Tribune*, *Trident*, *Trooper*, *Turbulent*, *Ultor*, *Unruly*, *Ursula*, and the *Dolfjyn* of the Royal Netherlands Navy.

Of this flotilla, Submarine P.222 disappeared in December, 1942, before submarines were named instead of being merely numbered. The *Turbulent*, *Tigris* and *Thunderbolt* were lost in March, 1943, and the *Sahib* and *Splendid* the month following. These are heavy casualties; but not unduly heavy in view of the dangerous conditions in which the boats had to work. The greater number of attacks, too, were carried out against heavily escorted convoys and in the face of increasing anti-submarine activity and efficiency on the part of the enemy.

Submarines of other flotillas working in the Eastern



Damage to stern of  
H.M.S. *Argonaut*  
after she had been  
torpedoed.



Mediterranean in 1941-2 had sunk 300,000 tons of Axis shipping. In so doing, they denied Rommel's mechanized army huge quantities of military stores and petrol, and so contributed directly to the victory at El Alamein in November, 1942. Working on the Axis supply line to Tunisia, the submarines of the 8th Flotilla from Algiers, and the 10th Flotilla from Malta, played their equal share in the final defeat and capitulation of those 600,000 German and Italian troops in the Cape Bon peninsula on May 12th, 1943.

I have no figures of the sinkings by the boats of the 10th Flotilla; but those of the 8th Flotilla, in the six months November 8th, 1942, to May 8th, 1943, sank 208,330 tons of enemy shipping and damaged another 31,150. The enemy losses inflicted by this flotilla in the same period included four U-boats, three destroyers, forty-four supply ships sunk or damaged, four large transports, and nine trawlers or petrol carriers. In all, eighty-one vessels large and small were destroyed.

In one period of four days we read of the *Safari* sinking two supply ships and two schooners, while in another of eight days she sank one supply ship and damaged a second, besides disposing of an armed merchant cruiser, an armed trawler, a tanker, a schooner and a brigantine. The *Sahib*, too, sank a tanker, two supply ships and four schooners in six days, while in four successive days the *Torbay* destroyed three supply ships, a minesweeper and a schooner. The *Saracen*, in broad daylight off Bastia, disposed of an Italian liner and a merchant vessel, and three mornings later attacked a convoy, of which one ship was torpedoed and blew up.

Here, in very abbreviated form, are the exploits of a few other boats of the 8th Flotilla.

A 7,000-ton transport escorted by two destroyers was attacked and sunk in bright moonlight. The submarine was heavily counter-attacked, but succeeded in escaping without damage and continued on patrol.

Another boat destroyed or damaged by gunfire two railway trains on the Italian coast where the line runs close to the sea

She did this at night from very close range, laying her gun on the entrance to a tunnel and opening fire when the headlights of the trains came into sight. The trains were electric, and the resulting firework display was described as magnificent. During the same cruise this submarine shelled and damaged some olive-oil tanks, besides demolishing the factory chimney. She ended by destroying an Italian schooner used for anti-submarine duties, and an ex-French merchant vessel of 2,000 tons manned by Germans.

Omitting times and technicalities, these are extracts from reports of submarines operating in enemy waters:

"Sighted two large ships escorted by destroyers, motor-vessels and aircraft. . . . Manœuvred to avoid escorts. Fired torpedoes. Heard explosions at correct intervals. Ship sank. . . . Attacked by depth-charges, which were ineffectual."

And again:

"Fired two torpedoes at tanker escorted by torpedo-boats. Both seen to be hit. Ship rolled over on her side and sank. Boat seen picking up survivors."

"Large escorted ship torpedoed. Heard explosion, and breaking-up noises. Dived deep. Destroyers passed overhead. Counter-attacked later. One depth-charge fairly close. Broke a good deal of glass."

"Destroyer's propellers overhead. Spent a few anxious moments waiting for bangs. Depth-charges came. They were close enough to be interesting and broke a number of lamps."

"Surfaced to attack schooner by gunfire. Crew abandoned ship and pulled for the shore, distant about two miles. Schooner, which was carrying petrol or ammunition, blew up with a heavy explosion."

In mid-January, 1943, a submarine of the flotilla based upon Malta was on patrol in the Sicilian Channel. After charging her batteries at night, she dived at 6 a.m. and spent an uneventful day until 5 p.m., when she heard the sounds of vessels approaching. Coming to periscope depth, she saw a large, fully-laden merchantman escorted by two destroyers. All the ships were zigzagging; but, reaching a position under

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the very nose of one of the destroyers, the submarine fired a salvo of four torpedoes. One was heard to hit and explode, after which all engine sounds from the target ceased and breaking-up noises followed. Within a few minutes the submarine was counter-attacked with thirty depth-charges, none of which was particularly close. It lasted for half an hour, during which the submarine was withdrawing at a depth of 120 feet. After about forty minutes' respite, another hunt began. This lasted just over an hour, and though the two destroyers were persistent and always fairly close, their depth-charges did no harm.

Shortly before 10.30 p.m., the submarine, which had been submerged for sixteen hours, came to the surface. There was an E-boat lying stopped less than a mile away. The submarine dived again at once, the hatch having been opened for a bare minute. Half an hour later another E-boat and two destroyers joined in another hunt, which lasted four hours. At times all four enemy ships were over the submarine, though none of them seem to have detected her, and all the depth-charges dropped were well clear.

By 3 a.m. next morning the sounds of the hunt had died away. The commanding officer was debating whether or not to surface to charge his batteries and to get some much-needed air into the boat when, at 4 a.m., another hunt started by four E-boats and a destroyer. It was not so close as the other three, but was much more trying. It lasted ninety minutes, until after dawn. This meant that with many hunting craft in the area, and possibly aircraft as well, the submarine must spend another day under water. At 7.15 a.m. a large convoy passed overhead, but as the submarine's batteries were very low and she had no chance of reloading her torpedoes, she could do nothing.

All that day she remained deep, the air becoming more and more foul with carbon dioxide. She did not finally surface until about 6.30 p.m. Apart from the one minute spent on the surface twenty hours before, which had made no difference to the atmosphere inside the boat, she had been under water for thirty-six hours. On surfacing "there was considerable distress



on board." The captain reported that "his mental powers were noticeably reduced" and that he felt "far from aggressive and spent the first few minutes on the bridge being extremely ill." So did another officer who was up there with him, and a large number of the crew below. "Mercifully," says the account, "we were not disturbed while thus engaged."

Reading these accounts, it is difficult to realize the conditions in which our submarines worked. The captains were not given to spreading themselves on paper. Time and time again, talking to officers and men whose boats had just returned to harbour flying the unofficial piratical black flag with the white skull and crossbones, with further devices indicating that enemy transports or supply ships had been sunk by torpedo, one was struck by their innate modesty and complete lack of braggadocio. They regarded their dangerous jobs as a matter of everyday routine and simple duty, not as anything particularly heroic or meritorious, certainly nothing to be talked about.

As has been said, they carried out their long patrols close to the enemy coast, or on the supply line to Tunisia, in areas studded with minefields, which were also the happy hunting grounds for hostile aircraft and surface patrols of light craft.

They sank transports and supply ships carrying troops, mechanized transport, ammunition, stores and fuel. Close inshore, they destroyed the small craft used by the enemy to carry petrol and ammunition. On the coast of Italy they damaged railways and destroyed installations and so forced the Italians to disperse their defence measures over a long and vulnerable coastline.

It used to be said that 90 per cent. of the men on board never saw daylight from the day they left harbour until they returned to base. By day the boats travelled submerged, using their periscopes every now and then to see what might be in sight, and to attack any enemy ship or convoy that appeared. By night they usually moved on the surface while recharging their batteries. Even so, no more than three or four men were

allowed on deck. It took time for men to scramble below through the small hatch of the conning-tower, and if an enemy patrol vessel were suddenly sighted the submarine had to crash dive in the shortest possible time. A few seconds' delay might conceivably spell disaster if the enemy was quick off the mark. It was only at night, too, that fresh air was sucked through the boat by the blowers, and the men were allowed to smoke.

Clothes were rarely taken off during a cruise. Washing facilities were exiguous. In the long hours of diving by day, the men employed themselves as they might—some playing games, some reading or writing, some just eating or sleeping, others engaged in their various hobbies, such as making little submarines in brass as presents for their best girls.

It is difficult to imagine the strain upon officers and men. When a convoy was attacked, a counter-attack usually followed. Inside the submerged hull one might hear the sound of the propellers of the hunting craft coming nearer and nearer; nearer still, perhaps to pass overhead with a throbbing, thrashing sound almost frightening in its intensity and so close that collision seemed inevitable. Depth-charges might be heard exploding—perhaps far away, sometimes coming closer and closer, occasionally so near that the whole boat might be violently shaken as if by the blow of a gigantic hammer. Leaks might be caused in the hull, and delicate instruments, gauge glasses and electric light bulbs broken. A near-miss by a depth-charge was invariably followed by the tinkle of falling glass.

It takes nerves of steel to stand the strain of modern submarine warfare, which is essentially a young man's job. Yet those who served in these boats would not have been elsewhere for worlds. On to the old traditions of the Royal Navy, they welded others peculiarly their own—traditions of service, sacrifice and magnificent courage in the face of the enemy and one of the most hazardous tasks of the war.

## III

In precisely the same way as we used our submarines to interrupt the enemy's lines of sea communications, so the enemy used his U-boats—German and Italian—to interrupt ours. As has been said, more than twenty U-boats were destroyed in the Western Mediterranean in the course of the Tunisian campaign, and many others damaged. It is impossible here to tell the story of each and every sinking. The few successes mentioned must be taken as typical of numerous others in which many ships and aircraft were engaged.

One of the first U-boats to be despatched after the Allied landings in North Africa was the Italian *Emo*, sunk off Algiers by H.M. trawler *Lord Nuffield* (skipper, Lieutenant D. S. Mair, R.N.R.), on November 10th, 1942. Aircraft had forced the *Emo* to dive, and while submerged she heard the sound of turbines. Coming up to periscope depth, she sighted a small vessel in the distance which she took to be a tug. Deciding that the little ship was not worth a torpedo, and not wishing to advertise his presence before an expected convoy came within range, the Italian captain took his ship down below periscope depth and continued to listen on his hydrophones.

At about 10.30 a.m., after hearing the sound of propellers, the *Emo* again came up to periscope depth to find the *Lord Nuffield* almost on top of her. The two ships were so close that the *Emo's* captain could see the trawler's men drawing their captain's attention to the periscope. The *Lord Nuffield*, indeed, which had made contact at some distance, was on the point of attacking. The *Emo* crash-dived, but too late. The trawler's charges exploded under her stern before she had gone deep, damaging the telemotor gear, extinguishing lights and smashing instruments. The pressure hull was badly bulged and water began to come in, entering also the radio cabin and officers' quarters, from which it flooded the forward magazine. The U-boat went down to about 300 feet.

The trawler, meanwhile, saw no visible results from her first attack and ran in to make a second. She lost contact and

dropped a single depth-charge, whereupon one of the *Emo's* engineers, already alarmed by the foulness of air in the boat, blew the tanks in a moment of panic without orders.

The *Emo* rose to the surface, and once there the Italian captain hoped to escape from his small opponent. He had the speed and armament. Then it was found that the diesels were damaged and could not be started, so the men were ordered to action stations. The *Lord Nuffield*, meanwhile, opened fire at 900 yards with her 4-inch gun, and was soon sweeping the *Emo's* deck with Oerlikon and machine guns. The trawler's third shell burst against the conning tower, and the fifth and sixth hit forward and aft of it, putting one of the enemy's guns out of action and preventing the Italians from making much of a reply with the other. The *Emo's* captain himself fired four rounds which did no serious damage; but then was forced to desist by the disappearance of the men whose duty it was to pass the ammunition. The *Lord Nuffield's* fire became more and more effective, one Italian petty officer having his eyebrows singed off by a shell which decapitated the man alongside him. The *Emo's* officers tried to fight it out, but the crew were in a state approaching panic. Realizing that further resistance was useless, the Italian captain gave orders to scuttle and abandon ship. Most of the crew, indeed, were already in the water.

Three-quarters of an hour after the *Lord Nuffield* had contacted her enemy the *Emo* sank. Ten Italians had been killed in the engagement, while another died of his wounds. The remainder were rescued and taken to Algiers.

Another submarine, the German U-660, commanded by an officer named Baur, was sunk off Algiers on November 12th.

On Hitler's personal instructions, all the U-boats in the area had been ordered to Algiers to intercept a large convoy. They were to do their utmost, the Fuehrer commanded. The very existence of the Afrika Korps depended upon their efforts. After being baulked in attacking by the manœuvres of another U-boat, which fired two torpedoes over U-660 and sank a large liner, Baur took his boat to Oran, where he lay off outside the harbour.

By early in the morning of November 12th he was again off Algiers, his officers and men strained and exhausted through the constant crash-diving forced upon them by the appearance of Allied aircraft. On one day they had to crash-dive no less than nineteen times.

Shortly after daylight, Baur was again in contact with an eastbound convoy. He had spoken to his crew, telling them of the position in the Mediterranean and Rommel's desperate situation. His speech, enthusiastically received, ended with three cheers for Hitler, and the crew, greatly elated, went back to their stations determined that U-660, as she had once done before in the Atlantic, should sink four ships with four torpedoes.

By about 9.30 a.m. Baur was in position to attack. The four torpedoes were ready, and orders had already been given to stand to fire. Then, through his periscope he saw one of the escorts, H.M. corvette *Lotus* (Lieutenant-Commander H. J. Hall, R.N.R.), turn towards him. The little warship dropped a pattern of depth-charges, which exploded beneath the U-boat and caused water to enter the motor compartment, besides putting some of the torpedo sighting gear out of order. Forced to dive, Baur took his boat down to more than 500 feet. Then the entry of more water put one of the electric motors out of action and began to alter the trim. Stores, ammunition and men were rushed forward to counteract it. This was overdone, for the boat then became heavy by the bows. The water, meanwhile, was gaining on the pumps and soon reached the batteries.

Four ships were hunting overhead, and one of them, the corvette *Starwort*, fired a pattern of depth-charges. With chlorine gas spreading throughout the boat and the main lighting extinguished, Baur took U-660 to the surface, at once to come under fire from all four ships. The order to abandon ship was carried out with perfect discipline, Baur remaining till the end to help the engineer with the scuttling.

The next day, in much the same area, the *Lotus* was implicated in the probable destruction of another U-boat with

her sister ship, H.M.S. *Poppy*. The hunt continued for three hours, both ships attacking. Finally, they heard the sounds of underwater explosions, followed by violent bubblings and breaking-up noises. Then there was silence. No wreckage or oil came to the surface. The depth of water was 1,400 fathoms.

Among others, Hudson aircraft of 500 Squadron R.A.F. played a conspicuous part in the anti-submarine war off North Africa and scored many successes. In one period of three days—November 14th–17th—they had three known “kills” of U-boats and two “probables.”

On the morning of November 14th aircraft discovered U-595 on the surface. Aircraft “X” was the first to attack, dropping her depth-charges across the U-boat’s stern from a height of ten feet. U-595 was apparently damaged, but opened up a heavy fire as “X” came in a second time, blowing out one of the aircraft’s fuel tanks and cutting the aileron control, so that she had to retire. Aircraft “F” then made two attacks, finally dropping depth-charges close ahead of the U-boat. This aircraft also came under heavy and accurate fire. The trimming cable in the tail unit was cut during the first attack. In the second she was severely damaged, the fuselage and landing tyre being hit, and the turret put out of action. Some of the shots went between the pilot’s legs and ignited some cartridges. The aircraft was set on fire, and the pilot, almost blinded in smoke, had to abandon his attack to allow his crew to deal with the flames.

Aircraft “W” now took a hand in the engagement, using her guns and dropping depth-charges. “K” then attacked from a height of 50 feet, dropping more depth-charges and opening fire on the Germans manning the guns. But U-595 was still undefeated, and her accurate fire so damaged the aircraft that she also had to break off the action, which had now lasted for twenty minutes.

The U-boat, however, was severely damaged, for just over an hour later she was sighted by another aircraft, “L,” making for the shore. Again she was attacked with depth-charges, a bomb and gunfire, after which she grounded and was again

fired upon by Aircraft "W" to prevent the Germans from sabotaging their boat. In spite of her punishment, U-595 was still using her guns in retaliation. A destroyer now opened fire on the beached submarine from a range of three miles; but without visible result. Aircraft "L," meanwhile, saw survivors from U-595 swimming ashore, and the smoke of an explosion rising from the conning-tower. She was a total loss to the enemy, and those of her crew who reached the shore were rounded up by a party of American soldiers.

By her sustained and accurate gunfire, that submarine had put three of her five attackers out of action. These low-flying attacks upon U-boats were anything but one-sided, and called for courage and determination of the highest order.

Another remarkable attack was carried out next day by Aircraft "5" of 500 Squadron, piloted by Flying Officer M. A. Ensor. It was a clear day with full visibility when, from a height of 7,000 feet, he saw a U-boat ten miles away on the surface. Ensor came down to attack from a height of 70 feet, the U-boat's conning-tower still being visible as he did so. Of the four depth-charges dropped, one was a "dry" hit. There was a heavy explosion, followed by two others inside the U-boat which blew away the gun and conning-tower. The other depth-charges exploded, and when the smoke and spray had cleared away the bows of the submarine were seen on the surface for thirty seconds in the midst of a circle of heavy air bubbles. Then all signs of her disappeared.

Ensor's aircraft, meanwhile, had been severely damaged by the first explosion. She was blown 300 feet into the air, losing her rudders and elevators, and having her aileron control jammed and six feet of each wing tip bent up at right angles. Two of her crew had been killed. Ensor shaped course for his base; but twenty minutes later one of his engines failed and the survivors of the crew had to bale out into the sea near Algiers, whence they were eventually rescued.

At this period upwards of fifty German and Italian submarines were thought to be operating off North Africa from their bases at Spezia and Cagliari. They had ample targets in

the shape of the many Allied convoys; but the mortality among them was severe indeed.

Among other "kills" in the Western Mediterranean, H.M.S. *Quentin* and H.M.A.S. *Quiberon* sank a U-boat off Bone on November 28th, while on the evening of December 4th the minesweeper *Cadmus*, one of the escorts to a convoy off Djedjelli, sighted a dark object which was soon identified as a conning-tower. At a distance of about 400 yards, the submarine altered course and began to dive, the phosphorescence of her wake clearly visible in the darkness. Increasing to full speed, the *Cadmus* rammed her enemy near the conning tower, being lifted bodily out of the water and listing to starboard before coming down with a heavy crash on the U-boat's hull. The submarine scraped down the minesweeper's side, and was plainly seen by the men aft. The *Cadmus* turned under full helm, and when the U-boat appeared on the surface with a heavy list to port and down by the stern, opened fire with an Oerlikon. After a few minutes the enemy submerged, her dark shape, silhouetted against the phosphorescence and bubbles, visible from the minesweeper's bridge as she passed overhead. A pattern of depth-charges was dropped, and two minutes after their explosion another much heavier detonation was heard under water. Nothing appeared on the surface except a large patch of oil. It was later established that this U-boat, though severely damaged, was able to return to her base.

Much the same sort of incident occurred nine days later, when before dawn, while escorting a convoy off Bougie, the sloop *Enchantress* sighted the phosphorescent tracks of three torpedoes, the nearest of which missed her by about 6 feet. She turned to comb the tracks, and very soon contacted and sighted a U-boat at a range of about 1,000 yards. The enemy turned through a right angle and fired two more torpedoes, which missed by 12 feet. A minute later the *Enchantress* rammed, striking the submarine, which had now started to dive, from fire on her starboard quarter. There came a heavy impact, and the sloop's speed was checked abruptly. As she



passed over the U-boat she dropped a depth-charge, which fell and exploded very close. She then carried out three more attacks on the spot where air bubbles were seen rising to the surface. There came another explosion from under water. Three-quarters of an hour later the bubbling ceased, and when daylight came there was a circular patch of oil, three miles in diameter, spreading over the surface. That submarine was accounted a "kill."

On the afternoon of January 13th, 1943, the corvette *Ville de Quebec*, of the Royal Canadian Navy (Lieutenant-Commander Robert Ernest Coleman, R.C.N.R.), was one of the escorts to a slow convoy on its way to Algiers from the west. She was ahead of the convoy when she suddenly obtained a contact with her asdic. She at once moved out to attack, and six minutes later dropped a pattern of ten depth-charges. The submarine, U-224, had been about to fire torpedoes when she saw the *Ville de Quebec* approaching. Breaking off the attack, the U-boat dived to about 65 feet and increased to full speed, her captain warning the crew to put on their life-belts and to expect depth-charges. They came almost at once, doing so much damage that U-224 could dive no deeper and had to come to the surface.

The next thing the *Ville de Quebec* saw was about 20 feet of the submarine's bow in the middle of the discoloured patches left on the water by the depth-charges. She was still moving ahead, and Coleman, who was leaving nothing to chance, at once opened fire with all his guns that would bear, hitting the U-boat repeatedly. Then, to make quite sure, he increased to full speed and rammed his enemy between the conning-tower and the foremost gun. As the *Ville de Quebec* closed, one man could be seen on the submarine's bridge taking cover as best he could from the gunfire, while another was trying to get clear of the conning tower. Struck at right angles, the U-boat rolled over, and the first man was flung into the water. Exactly ten minutes after the first contact, U-224 went to the bottom at a very steep angle. Two minutes later there was a heavy explosion under water and large bubbles

came bursting on the surface. The only survivor was the man who had been thrown overboard, Sub-Lieutenant Danckworth, U-224's first lieutenant, who had been sent up by his captain to survey the damage. In the heavy swell that was running, his rescue was a matter of some difficulty.

One remembers Lieutenant-Commander Coleman bringing the *Ville de Quebec* into Algiers with her bows considerably crumpled, but her crew jubilant. Many of them were French Canadians, which was made the most of by the local French Press when, by special permission, the tale of the *Ville de Quebec's* exploit was announced in an official communiqué and journalists were allowed to visit the ship.

Six days later, on January 19th, the Canadian corvette *Port Arthur* (Lieutenant Edward Theodore Simmons, R.C.N.V.R.), with H.M.S. *Antelope*, sank the Italian submarine *Tritone*.

At 2.15 p.m., in a calm sea, light breeze and full visibility, when the *Port Arthur* was one of the escorts to a slow convoy on its way to Bone, she located a submarine at the distance of about a mile. Calling his men to action stations, Simmons increased to full speed and swung round to attack. A pattern of depth-charges were dropped a few minutes later. They did enormous damage, blowing the *Tritone's* main fuses, putting the electric motors out of action, fracturing or distorting the pipes of the air pressure system, and causing severe leaks in the fuel tanks. Completely out of control, the submarine, with her crew in a state of virtual panic, went far beyond the depth she had reached on her trials. The engineer told the captain that if he wished to save the lives of his men he must come to the surface. Orders were given for the tanks to be blown, and the *Tritone* rose. She appeared, bows first, within 700 yards of the *Antelope*, which promptly opened fire. The *Port Arthur*, which had been intending to ram, steamed out of the destroyer's way.

The *Tritone's* crew were completely demoralized. The captain wished to fight it out on the surface, and first ordered the torpedo-tubes to be fired. His next order was to man the

guns, which was seized upon by some of the crew as an excuse to escape. There was a wild rush into the conning-tower, which at that moment received a direct hit from one of the *Antelope's* shells, killing several men. The captain then ordered the boat to be abandoned and the vents to be opened with the idea of preventing boarding, for the *Antelope* was closing fast. This meant that many of the men were imprisoned in the forward and after torpedo compartments, as the forward watertight doors were jammed and the after hatch submerged. By some miracle, however, three managed to escape from aft.

The *Tritone* finally sank by the stern within two minutes of surfacing, her bows disappearing vertically. A few minutes later there came a prolonged, muffled explosion from far below the calm surface of the sea. A number of survivors were rescued.

Lieutenant Simmons, the *Port Arthur's* captain, lived, before the war, in Victoria, British Columbia, where he had an appointment with the Department of Education. Among his crew were six French Canadians. The corvette had been built at Port Arthur, Ontario, and commissioned at Montreal in May, 1942. Before coming to the Western Mediterranean, she had been employed on escort duty with convoys between Newfoundland, Canada and ports on the east coast of the United States.

The third submarine to be accounted for by Canadians working with convoys off North Africa was the Italian *Avorio*, sunk on the night of February 8th, 1943, by the corvette *Regina* (Lieutenant-Commander Harry Freeland, R.C.N.R.).

Sailing from her base on February 6th with two other submarines, the *Avorio* reached her patrol area off Philippeville early next morning. She sighted a convoy a few hours later; but the sudden appearance of a motor torpedo-boat forced her to crash dive before she could attack. During the daylight hours of February 8th she remained submerged, surfacing after dark to re-charge her batteries. At 11 p.m. on that fine, starlit night, with a gentle breeze and moderate swell, the *Avorio* was travelling at seven knots with all her hatches open.

Her operators were listening at the hydrophones; but the noise of the engines seems to have drowned all outside sounds. The *Regina* had already made contact, and was within 600 yards before the Italians became aware of her presence. The *Avorio* immediately crash-dived and went down to 200 feet, altered course, and lay stopped.

Reaching the position, the corvette let go her pattern of depth-charges. They burst with effect, causing leaks in the *Avorio's* pressure hull, damaging a pump, and extinguishing the lights. A second pattern started more leaks in the conning-tower through which water cascaded into the control-room. The submarine was already out of control when a third consignment of depth-charges exploded under her bows, punctured the ballast tanks, and brought more flooding. Forced to the surface, the *Avorio* at once came under the accurate fire of the *Regina*. The Italian captain did his best to manœuvre the boat to fire his bow torpedoes; but the tubes were so distorted by the depth-charges that they were useless. Next he tried using his superior speed to escape on the surface, only to discover that the rudder had been jammed hard over, and the boat could only turn in circles. That commanding officer was brave and unusually persistent, for he next made an attempt to man his gun. But when those who had survived the corvette's fire got to it, they found that it also was out of action and useless. Realizing the utter hopelessness of the situation the captain gave orders to stop the engines and abandon ship. He had hardly done so when one of the *Regina's* shells burst against the conning-tower and flung him and his first lieutenant overboard, probably killing them outright. They were never seen again.

The action came to an end when these two officers vanished. It had lasted fifteen minutes. All the Italians on deck had been killed or wounded by the *Regina's* deadly gunfire. Those below were only too anxious to scramble up the conning-tower and throw themselves into the sea, crying, "Help!" and "My friend!"

The corvette sent away a boarding party, and the *Avorio's*

engineer officer, seeing them coming, threw the secret papers overboard in a weighted container and jumped in after them. An engine-room artificer had been left below to scuttle the ship; but the vent controls were jammed and the scuttling charges under water and inaccessible. The *Avorio* was taken in tow by a tug, but, with her ballast tanks and after compartments flooding, sank about five hours later. Twenty-seven survivors had been rescued. As Lieutenant-Commander Freeland wrote in a private letter, "*Regina's* only casualty is an engine-room artificer, who was kissed by an Italian."

These exploits, and the consistent good work of the Canadian corvettes, earned them a complimentary signal from the Commander-in-Chief when they left his command some weeks later. We were all sorry to see the last of them.

Another notable success occurred on February 17th, 1943, when the Italian submarine *Asteria* was sunk by the "Hunt" class destroyers *Wheatland* and *Easton*.

Shortly before 3 a.m., fifty miles north-west of Bougie, the *Asteria*, having charged her batteries, was moving west at eight knots with another submarine in company. Visibility was poor, when two small ships, which the Italian captain took to be corvettes, were sighted at a distance of about two miles. The *Asteria* manoeuvred to fire torpedoes, but in a few minutes was detected by the *Wheatland* (Lieutenant-Commander R. de L. Brooke), which altered course to attack. The submarine dived, and the destroyer, arriving at the spot where her enemy had disappeared, dropped five depth-charges. They detonated sufficiently close to put out the *Asteria's* lights, to smash instruments and damage the steering gear, and to force her down for several hundred feet, more or less out of control. At a depth of between 400 and 500 feet, she made off to the northward, striving to shake off her hunters.

For nearly an hour she managed to elude them. It was not until 4.10 a.m. that the *Wheatland* again made contact, which she followed up with a pattern of ten depth-charges. Their explosion did great damage, bending one of the U-boat's propeller shafts and putting the hydroplanes out of action.

Two further attacks were carried out about an hour later. They did no further damage, and the *Asteria* remained obstinately submerged.

For two more hours the destroyer lost contact, when the *Easton* (Lieutenant C. W. Malins), regained it and made an attack which blew the submarine's main motor fuses and started leaks in the stern glands. Half an hour later the *Easton* dropped three more charges which fractured one of the pipes of the *Asteria's* compressed air system and shook her badly. By this time her motors were out of order. The compressed-air flasks used for altering trim by blowing tanks were rapidly becoming exhausted, while some of this high-pressure air had escaped inside the boat to cause acute discomfort to the crew.

The hunt had now been on for six hours, and still the U-boat remained under water. Both destroyers, moreover, had started without their full outfits of depth-charges and were now running short. At 9.16 a.m. the *Easton* dropped her last couple with some effect. The *Wheatland* then followed with a pattern which detonated above the U-boat and caused leaks in the hatch of the conning-tower.

The *Asteria's* engineer officer advised his captain to come to the surface, and the captain, realizing the grave damage, agreed. Because of the depleted air pressure, the boat rose slowly, and it was first in the captain's mind to try escaping on the surface. But this, he decided, would lead to unnecessary loss of life, so he ordered his men to prepare to abandon ship. She finally appeared on the surface at 9.30 a.m. after a hunt lasting six and a half hours.

The *Wheatland* and *Easton* opened fire with their light guns as a deterrent against resistance. The Italian crew, however, had had enough. Clustering aft on deck, they waved white and red handkerchiefs in token of surrender. The *Asteria's* sea cocks had been opened, but her captain, thinking she was not sinking fast enough and might be boarded, tried to go below to complete the business. His servant and one other man, thinking he intended to go down with his ship, seized him, forcibly removed his trousers to facilitate swimming, and held

him fast until the sea was closing over the deck. Then they took to the water.

The *Asteria* finally sank at 9.40 a.m., all but four of the crew of fifty-two being rescued. Two were probably sucked under with the boat, one was seized with cramp and was drowned, while the fourth casualty completely lost his head and jumped overboard with wild shouts, clutching two bottles of brandy!

The *Wheatland*, with the other "Hunt" class destroyers *Bicester* (Lieutenant-Commander S. W. F. Bennetts), and *Lamerton* (Lieutenant-Commander C. R. Purse), was again concerned with the sinking of an U-boat near Algiers in the afternoon of February 23rd, 1943. At 9 a.m. they had been ordered to search for a submarine sighted on the surface, and, steaming to the area, started operations at about 10.30 a.m. About two and a half hours later the *Bicester* made contact. She attacked with depth-charges, the explosion of which brought air bubbles, oil, wreckage and human remains floating to the surface. The *Wheatland* attacked a little later, bringing up more wreckage and oil. She was followed by the *Lamerton*, her attack resulting in a very loud underwater explosion, far louder than the explosion of the depth-charges. More wreckage came to the surface. Then the *Bicester* attacked again, and at 2.8 p.m. stopped in middle of the area of discoloured water where her depth-charges had exploded. "To our delight," wrote her commanding officer, "we found some interesting and rather encouraging-looking wreckage, the air being fragrant with the delicious smell of Diesel oil." The U-boat was never actually sighted at any time, but was definitely destroyed.

#### IV

At 3 p.m. on February 15th, three motor-torpedo-boats sailed from Malta with orders to patrol south of Marittimo, the small island at the western end of Sicily, to intercept enemy shipping supplying the Axis armies in Tunisia. Lieutenant R. A. M. Hennessy, R.N., the senior officer of the 7th M.T.B. Flotilla, was on board No. 77, commanded by Lieutenant

J. B. Sturgeon, R.N.V.R. The other boats were No. 82 (Lieutenant P. R. A. Taylor, R.N.V.R.) and No. 61 (Lieutenant T. J. Bligh, R.N.V.R.). No. 61, equipped as a gunboat, did not carry torpedo-tubes.

The passage was uneventful and was carried out in fine weather. At 9.40 p.m., after reaching their patrol area, the flotilla had news of an enemy merchantman and two destroyers approaching Marittimo from the south-eastward. At 11.25 the boats stopped engines because of a defect in No. 61's dynamo, and at that very moment they had a report of another four merchantmen, accompanied by three destroyers, to the northward. Before the position could even be plotted on the chart, 61 sighted a large merchant ship to starboard at a distance of about one and a half miles.

All three boats moved off, Nos. 77 and 82 steering to get the convoy silhouetted against the light of the moon. Bligh, in 61, decided to carry out the prearranged plan of going to the rear of the convoy to create a diversion. This would give the torpedo-carrying boats a better chance of attacking unseen.

As 77 and 82 closed, they saw two columns of merchant ships with a strong escort of destroyers steering a course almost opposite to their own. One column of two ships, with a destroyer ahead, was on the port bow in an ideal position for attack. Hennessy made the necessary signal, and from then on the boats acted independently.

It was a tense moment. No. 77, with Hennessy on board, swung to port, heading for the leader of the westernmost line. While so doing she had to increase speed to twenty knots to avoid the ships in the easternmost column, passing so close that it was only by a miracle that she remained unseen until she was within 400 yards of her selected target and fired her torpedo. They saw its whitened track in the dark water and knew it was running correctly, so decided to make a large alteration to starboard to attack the rear ship in the other line, the columns being about half a mile apart.

Things started to happen in split seconds. One enemy



ship after another opened fire, the merchant vessels using heavy and light machine guns, and the destroyers firing 4-inch high-explosive shell which burst about 50 feet in the air. The air vibrated to the crashing roar of gunfire mingled with the chattering staccato sound of machine guns. The black shapes of the oncoming ships became wreathed in smoke punctuated by the orange glare of gun flashes, and the darkness of the night was filled with the vari-coloured streams of tracer—red, yellow and a sickly green. Shell whined and burst overhead or on hitting the water, while the sea spurted under a hail of fragments and flying bullets. Thrilling as a spectacle, it was a period of breathless excitement for those on board those three high-speed boats packed with machinery and with hulls no thicker than stout cardboard. One flying fragment or bullet in a vital spot might quite well mean the end, while for the men there was nothing in the way of protection.

It was in the midst of this babel of action that the officers on the bridge of 77 felt the thud of a heavy detonation, which led them to hope that their torpedo had gone home. It had. It was later reported that those in No. 82 had seen the flash and an upheaval of spray and black smoke as it hit and exploded.

Running the gauntlet, 77 reached a position about 300 yards on the bow of her second target, and tried to fire another torpedo. She was travelling at high speed, and in the heat and excitement of battle it was not immediately realized that the firing mechanism had failed and the weapon had not left its tube. It was mortifying, though the ship they had hoped to destroy did not get off scathless. Hennessy saw her struck full on the bridge by a burst of about ten heavy cannon shell fired at 77 by some other vessel.

Hennessy then decided to attack another ship with depth-charges before finally disengaging. Increasing speed, 77 passed close under the bows of her new target. Lieutenant D. M. W. Napier, R.N.V.R., had gone aft to let go the depth-charges at the right moment, most unhappily to be killed before the time came. The enemy's gunfire was intense and accurate;

but passing right under the stem of the oncoming merchantman, narrowly missing her heaped-up bow wave, 77 peppered her at point-blank range just above the waterline with a trayful of incendiary shells from a heavy machine gun.

So fierce was the enemy's fire that it was now a matter of disengaging to the southward under cover of smoke. However, the smoke-producing apparatus had been hit and damaged, and for another ten minutes 77 remained the target for many guns, finally to emerge with splinter holes in the engine-room, tank space and crew space, and some damage on deck.

Taylor, in 82, after parting company from 77, had decided to steer between the enemy lines and to attack the first convenient target he saw. Coming under very heavy fire from many directions, he also fired a torpedo, which unfortunately went wide. Hotly engaged by a destroyer and an E-boat, he withdrew to the southward and later joined 77.

On separating from the other two, Bligh, in 61, increased to full speed and passed at close range down the eastern column of the convoy, engaging the merchant ships with his heavy machine guns as he went. Stopping abreast of a destroyer in the rear of the convoy, he then threw flares into the sea in the hope of tempting one of the escorting E-boats away from her station and into an engagement. But the enemy was not to be persuaded. All that happened was that the destroyer opened fire at the flares. Circling astern of the convoy and up and down the western column, Bligh gave the other merchantmen and some E-boats further doses of gunfire, and repeated his trick with the flares, though without success. He finally withdrew at about 1 a.m., having fought a skilful and resolute action lasting one and a half hours with greatly superior forces. Incidentally, the wheel steering gear was out of order throughout the engagement, and 61 had to be steered from aft with the tiller, a cumbrous expedient with a fast-moving craft in hot action at night.

This battle, typical of so many others fought with gallantry and determination by the young men of the light coastal craft, resulted in one merchant ship being sunk, and others, and

possibly some E-boats as well, damaged by gunfire. To the enemy it reiterated the dismal fact that his convoys were nowhere safe at sea.

## v

And so the relentless war continued, with its character constantly changing in our favour. During March, 1943, two convoys reached hard-pressed Malta from Alexandria, unloading 28,000 tons of general cargo and foodstuffs and some 8,000 tons of oil fuel. These convoys continued to be run until April, when the likelihood of the enemy's evacuation of Tunisia by sea called for the services of all available destroyers.

The Eighth Army, advancing from the south, meanwhile occupied Sfax, on the east coast of Tunisia, on April 10th, the port being badly damaged and its channel blocked. However, it was soon sufficiently cleared to admit tank-landing craft, and was fully open by April 13th. The first convoy from Tripoli arrived next day, and more than 14,000 tons of Army stores had been discharged by the end of the month.

Sousse, some eighty miles north of Sfax, was occupied on April 12th. Though the harbour was congested with sunken wrecks, the entrance partially blocked, and the approaches heavily mined, the enemy had retreated so hurriedly that the port itself was little damaged. Motor launches were set to work to clear the minefields in the approaches, and by April 17th sufficient supplies of petrol had arrived to allow motor-torpedo-boats to use the port as an advanced base for strikes against enemy shipping. They began to arrive on the 22nd.

The M.T.Bs. had been doing very good work. On the night of April 16th-17th, for instance, M.T.Bs. 634 and 656 from Bone, operating off the Gulf of Tunis, sighted a convoy of enemy merchantmen escorted by destroyers. In the engagement which followed one of the enemy merchantmen was hit and destroyed. Soon afterwards aircraft of the Naval Air Arm on patrol attacked this same convoy with torpedoes. They first sighted flares from gunfire, and on investigation found a convoy escorted by warships firing heavily on the M.T.Bs.

The gunfire died away, and the aircraft saw a huge mushroom of smoke on the sea and a ship stopped, probably the results of the M.T.B. attack. Some of the naval aircraft carried out a dive-bombing attack, while others went in low through intense and accurate flak. At least one torpedo went home on a large tanker, an observer seeing a double plume of water shoot up from her side. The pilot of that aircraft had to put his plane into a violent skidding turn to avoid collision with his target. He passed so low and so close to the ship astern that she could not depress her guns to bear.

On the night of April 23rd-24th light coastal forces near Bizerta were attacked by a J.U.88 and shot it down in flames. On the next night, operating in the Gulf of Tunis, they sank two petrol-carriers, rescuing some survivors, while on the following night M.T.B. 311 sank a small enemy merchantman off Bizerta.

On April 27th Sir Andrew Cunningham signalled to the Senior Officer, Inshore Squadron, Commodore G. N. Oliver, at Bone that the Coastal Forces were contributing greatly to the difficulties of the enemy in Tunisia and the advance of our armies. He was following their excellent work with intense interest, and they must "keep going all out."

As has been said, motor-torpedo-boats arrived at Sousse on April 22nd, and as dawn broke at about 6 a.m. on the 28th three boats of the 32nd M.T.B. Flotilla were moving up the east coast of Tunisia towards Kelibia. They were Nos. 639 (Lieutenant G. L. Russell, R.N.V.R.), 633 (Lieutenant H. E. Butler, R.N.R.), and 637 (Lieutenant E. F. Smyth, R.N.V.R.), with Lieutenant P. F. S. Gould, R.N., the Senior Officer of the flotilla, on board 639. The enemy was still in occupation of the Cape Bon peninsula, and the little ships had sailed from Sousse the evening before with orders to sweep north along the hostile coast to attack the enemy's coastal shipping and harass his land formations.

Steering up the coast at a distance of about a mile, they rounded Kelibia Point and moved on unmolested, observing, among things, enemy batteries, a party of men building a

jetty, and two wrecks on the beach. The sea was calm, with perfect visibility and an unclouded sky. At 8.50 a.m. they rounded Cape Bon and steered along the precipitous, rugged coast to the westward, seeing the rusty remains of a wrecked Italian destroyer lying on the rocks on her beam-ends. At 9.30, just east of Ras el Amar, they sighted two Italian motor-minesweepers in a small creek. Closing in to point-blank range, they opened fire, leaving the enemy craft so damaged as to be useless. Closing Ras el Amar, they then shot up a German armed motor-launch, setting her on fire from stem to stern. They also amused themselves by bombarding several J.U.52's lying on the beaches, all of them being hit by shell from 2-pounder pompoms. While this was going on, a Fieseler-Storch transport plane was also fired upon and hit before landing.

Having thus made themselves obnoxious, the three M.T.Bs. moved out to sea to a position twelve miles north-east of Cape Bon, and, after investigating a large enemy hospital ship, which was left unharmed, steered back towards Kelibia. Enemy aircraft flying very high had been sighted at 10 a.m., but it was at about ten minutes past noon that they first saw enemy fighters. Then, half an hour later, they sighted the sort of target for which they were looking—a merchantman of about 3,000 tons steering northward and escorted by two small destroyers. There were fighters overhead. With such a formidable escort, it was clear that the merchantman carried a valuable cargo.

Gould at once gave orders to attack with torpedoes, and all three boats closed the enemy at high speed. No. 639, with Gould himself on board, had no torpedoes, so carried out a gun attack on the leading destroyer escort with the idea of diverting her attention from the torpedo-carrying boats. It was at this moment, 12.40 p.m., that all the M.T.Bs. came under heavy fire from the destroyers and some batteries on shore, all types of guns being used from 4.7's to 20-mm. machine guns. Enemy fighters in groups of twos and fours also came roaring down with their cannon and machine guns spluttering.

At 12.45 No. 639 laid a smoke-screen and turned off to the northward. Seven minutes later, under heavy fire, No. 633 (Butler) and 637 (Smyth) fired torpedoes at a range of about 2,000 yards and turned seaward to disengage. It was at about this time that 633 was hit by the fire from fighter aircraft, though the brunt of the attacks fell upon 639. No. 637 closed her to assist with gunfire; but at 1.10 No. 639, repeatedly hit by the enemy's cannon, was seen to be in flames, with her crew abandoning ship. Running alongside, Smyth, in 637, embarked wounded survivors, while other men were rescued from the water by 633.

No. 639's captain, Lieutenant Russell, and three seamen, had been killed. Gould, together with 639's first lieutenant, Lieutenant A. Heybyrne, R.N.V.R., Midshipman Anthony Youatt, R.N.V.R., and two seamen were severely wounded, while seven other ratings were slightly wounded. In his report, Smyth mentioned Midshipman Youatt, who, in spite of his serious wounds, had thrown overboard the confidential books and assisted in caring for the other wounded, showing remarkable coolness. The coxswain of 639, Petty Officer Patrick Crossey, though wounded in the leg, rigged the towing gear in case it might be possible to save the boat. But salvage was out of the question, and 639 had to be destroyed by gunfire.

The enemy aircraft, meanwhile, of which there were between twenty and forty in the air at one time, seemed to hold off while the work of rescue was in progress. Possibly their pilots thought that all three boats were knocked out. The moment that 637 and 633 were under way again, however, the attacks recommenced, though less fiercely than before. At least one fighter was brought down by 633's Oerlikon gunner. The enemy shore batteries continued to fire until the boats were finally out of range, and the fighter attacks ceased at about 1.48.

Gould died of his wounds on board 637 at about 2 p.m. His remains were carried to Sousse, where they were buried with such military honours as could be provided on the day after the action. He had not been long in the Mediterranean; but had already earned the Distinguished Service Cross and bar

for his services in action in M.T.Bs. in Home waters. The death of this brave officer was very much to be regretted. As a senior officer wrote in his report: "He had shown himself to be a skilful and dashing leader. . . . In particular, he showed great bravery in carrying out diversionary attacks on the escorting destroyers. . . ."

In this, the first daylight action fought by M.T.Bs. during the Tunisian campaign, we lost one boat and several valuable lives. On the other hand, the enemy's losses were considerable. Besides the two motor-minesweepers and the R-boat, the merchantman, hit and seriously damaged by torpedo, later broke up and sank under air attack.

CHAPTER IV

“RETRIBUTION”

I

THE beginning of May saw the last really serious effort of the enemy to supply his army in Tunisia. Moreover, by us the possibility of his wholesale evacuation by sea had been visualized months before, and the necessary plans drawn up. More destroyers were sent to Malta from the Levant, and all these ships, together with the M.T.Bs., M.G.Bs., with a few of their American counterparts, the P.T. boats, were soon being used to the full limit of their capacity for nightly sweeps of the Sicilian Channel and the approaches to Bizerta and Tunis. The destroyers worked from Bone and Malta, and the light coastal craft from Bone, Malta and Sousse.

The Allied armies were already closing in on Bizerta and Tunis from the west and south; but until the end of the first week in May, when the rapid advance on shore permitted our fighter aircraft to use the forward airfields to provide the necessary air cover by daylight, our surface forces operated only by night. In daylight the strikes against enemy shipping were undertaken by aircraft.

On the afternoon of May 3rd the destroyers *Nubian* (Commander D. Holland-Martin), *Paladin* (Lieutenant-Commander L. St. J. Rich) and *Petard* (Lieutenant-Commander R. C. Egan) sailed from Malta on an offensive sweep. They steamed at high speed to the westward, and by 11.40 p.m. were off Kelibia, to the southward of Cape Bon. The night was very dark, with a haze and low visibility near the coast. The three ships were in line ahead in the order *Nubian*, *Petard*, *Paladin*, when they became aware of a ship fine on the port bow at a distance of about three miles. They reduced



speed to twenty knots, and at 11.47 sighted their target. Fire was opened at once, the *Petard* being ordered to illuminate the enemy with her searchlight. In the misty weather it was not very effective; but hits were obtained almost immediately and the ship, a large merchant vessel, burst into flames.

After firing about ten salvos from her 4.7's, the *Nubian* then sighted a second vessel, presently identified as one of the 650-ton Italian torpedo-boats. From the increasing white trail of her wake, Holland-Martin saw she had increased speed, so went on at thirty knots and opened fire. Hit by the *Nubian's* first salvo, and with the *Petard* and *Paladin* also in action, the torpedo-boat practically stopped, belching smoke and steam.

After scouring the water close inshore for further shipping and discovering none, the *Nubian* led the *Petard* and *Paladin* back past the damaged destroyer, which was again engaged and hit. She showed no signs of surrender and seemed reluctant to sink, so, leaving the *Paladin* to deal with her, the *Nubian* and *Petard* steamed off towards the merchant ship, which was now several miles away and blazing from stem to stern. They were about three or four miles off when this ship blew up with a mighty explosion, thus described by Holland-Martin: "An orange mound rose where we had last seen her. As this subsided the blast could be felt all over my ship. In the boiler-rooms the stokers complained that it felt as if their ears were being drawn out. In the wireless office signals were whisked off the tables. The ship was surrounded by a roar as of many enemy bombers."

This vessel, some of whose survivors were rescued, was a ship of between 7,000 and 8,000 tons bound from Naples to Tunis with mechanized transport, bombs and land-mines for Rommel's army.

The destroyers were being used "all out." This was the *Nubian's* twenty-second strike against enemy shipping since her arrival at Malta in December, 1942, and on seven of those nights she had been present at the destruction of one or more enemy supply ships and their escorts. As with all the other destroyers, these operations meant keeping the ship's company

closed up at their stations for long periods in a state of complete alertness and readiness for action. The incessant work, too, meant a great deal of high-speed running, with very short spells in harbour and the ships at short notice for steam. In this respect, Commander Holland-Martin drew particular attention to the fine work of the *Nubian's* engine-room department. Lieutenant-Commander (E.) G. F. Turnbull and Chief Engine-room Artificer J. Tomlin, he said, had worked cheerfully and faced setbacks and difficulties with complete imperturbability. On the day of the action just described, for instance, the evaporator distiller was still under repair by the ship's staff when the ship hurriedly sailed from Malta, and was not finally reassembled until some hours later.

The *Paladin*, too, had a worthy record. Serving in the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean, she steamed 109,660 miles in the first two years of her commission without once refitting in a dockyard, a great tribute to those of her engineering department. Based on Malta in December, 1942, she carried out her first offensive sweep against enemy shipping on Christmas Day. From then until the end of April, 1943, she was constantly at sea in the Sicilian Channel, round Pantellaria, and off the Cape Bon peninsula. Her personal bag was one Italian destroyer torpedoed and sunk. In company with other ships, she helped to destroy two more Italian destroyers and two supply ships, and left an armed lighter blazing furiously. During one of these offensive sweeps in April she had the unhappy task of torpedoing a sister ship, the *Pakenham*, which had been damaged in a successful action with enemy torpedo-craft and could not reach Malta. When dawn broke they were close to the Sicilian coast, fifteen miles from an enemy aerodrome, and 150 miles from home. The crew of the *Pakenham* were rescued, and the *Paladin* returned to Malta at thirty-two knots.

The performance of the *Paladin's* engine-room branch had also been noteworthy, and among the men who had shown great devotion to duty and a fine example to the younger men in conditions of almost continuous strain was Chief Stoker Laws, who hailed from Brighton, Sussex. Aged forty-four, he

had served in the Merchant Navy during the War of 1914-18, and later had joined the Royal Navy, in which he had spent twenty-two years, most of the time in submarines and then in destroyers. The work of a chief stoker in a destroyer is no sinecure. Apart from his normal work at sea, the job of fire-fighting in action, and hull preservation at all times, the chief stoker and his upper-deck party of stokers have to fuel and water ship on returning to harbour while other luckier men can go below and make up for arrears of sleep. His officers said of Laws that he and his record "command respect and are a credit to the Service that trained him." The Navy is not lavish with its praise, so we may be very certain that they meant it.

## II

By May 8th the net on the Axis forces in Tunisia was tightening both by sea and by land. Advanced elements of the Allied Army had already entered Tunis and Bizerta, though street-fighting continued and the enemy still held the guns commanding the entrance to Bizerta Harbour.

At 3 a.m. on May 8th, exactly six months and one hour after the landings in North Africa had begun, Commodore G. N. Oliver, Senior Officer Inshore Squadron, on receipt of a message from Army Headquarters that our troops were entering Bizerta, hoisted his broad pendant in M.T.B. 637 (Lieutenant E. F. Smyth, R.N.V.R.) and, in company with M.G.B. 643, slipped and proceeded to sea from Bone. Keeping between five and ten miles off the coast, they entered Bizerta Bay, and at 9.33 altered course to close the port. On arriving off Bizerta at ten o'clock, they found the town apparently deserted, but with French flags flying everywhere. There was an artillery battle going on in the hills.

At 10.15 the boats entered the harbour by the eastern entrance and moved past the eastern mole. The many wrecks and obstructions necessitated some intricate manœuvring, and at 10.17, when both boats had stopped, they came under heavy close-range fire from cannon and machine guns, heavy

and light. One high-explosive shell hit 637's signal halliards and burst, seriously wounding the captain, Smyth, and her first lieutenant, Sub-Lieutenant Arrandale. The south side of the harbour works were still held by the enemy in some strength, against which two light coastal craft could do nothing. Using her screws to turn, 637, whose motor mechanic had been mortally wounded, made for the harbour entrance, followed by 643.

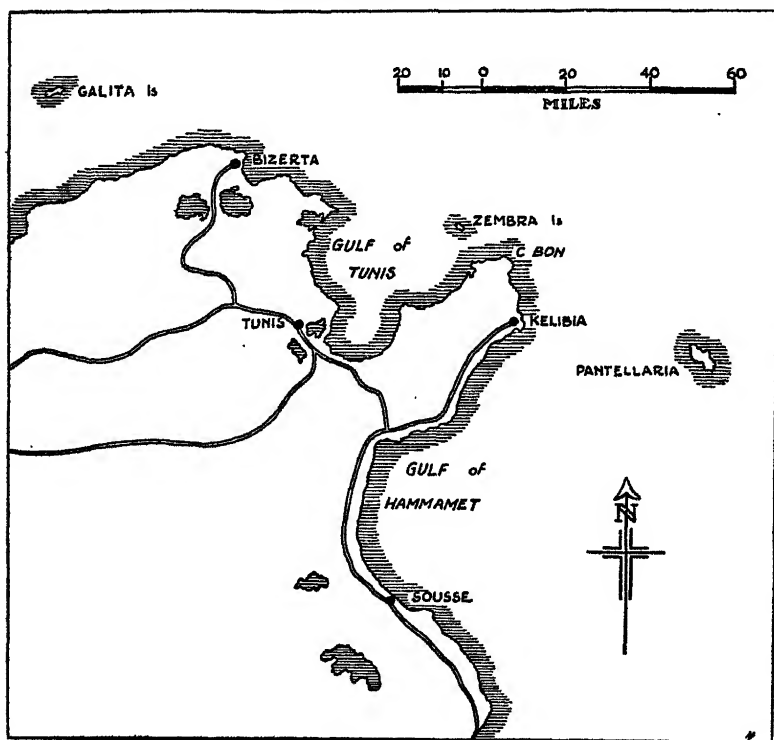
Once outside 637 made smoke, which was ineffective in the high westerly wind. Then 643 took station on her consort's port quarter and put up a smoke-screen. This gave a certain amount of cover, though the strong wind soon dispersed it. The enemy continued to shell both boats from the coastal batteries in the hills until 10.47 as they retired to the north-east at full speed. Both the little ships had been repeatedly hit and had suffered damage. Smyth, of 637, had been wounded in three places; but, making light of his severe injuries, stuck to his bridge until they were out of range, when Commodore Oliver ordered him below.

The engine-room personnel did well to get 637 back to Bone at 8 p.m. in rough weather with the machinery partially disabled, and she finally reached her base with only one engine running. Several bullets had also passed through the engine-room of 643 and one small shell had exploded inside. She had one man wounded. Her gun pumps needed constant attention, and there were serious leaks in the main engine cylinder jackets. But all through the action Chief Motor Mechanic Hunter refused to take cover, and, without any thought for his personal safety, inspired all the engine-room staff by his fine example. He probably saved the ship.

The stage was already set for the final phase of the Tunisian campaign. A close blockade of the Cape Bon peninsula was established by destroyers and light coastal craft, though at first the latter had difficulty in maintaining their stations in the strong breeze and moderate, breaking sea. It was now, on May 8th, that Sir Andrew Cunningham made that inspiring signal to his ships: "Sink, burn and destroy. Let nothing pass."

They had their orders. Everything was ready and prepared. In remembrance of the evacuation of the British troops from Greece and Crete nearly two years before, the code name for this naval mopping-up operation off Tunisia was "Retribution."

The blockade was tightened, and by May 9th, when fighter



TUNISIA.

cover became available from the recently captured airfields, the destroyers started to operate by day. The area had been heavily mined by ourselves and the enemy. This meant that destroyers from Bone had to make a considerable detour to the northward to reach their patrol grounds, which not only wasted time, but exposed them to air attack from Sicily. Minesweepers, however, had already been concentrated, and by May 11th had cleared a channel through from Bone to Bizerta, an arduous undertaking most successfully carried out.

To reinforce the blockade, more destroyers had been sent to Malta from the Eastern Mediterranean, the *Aldenham*, *Exmoor* and *Hursley* reaching the island on May 6th and the *Dulverton*, *Beaufort* and *Tetcott*, with the *Miaoulis* and *Pindos* of the Royal Hellenic Navy, on the 9th. With the other destroyers from Malta, *Fervis*, *Nubian*, *Paladin*, *Isis*, *Petard* and the Greek *Queen Olga*, and those from Bone, *Laforey*, *Loyal*, *Tartar*, *Bicester*, *Zetland*, *Easton*, *Oakley*, and the Greek *Kanaris*, they were soon on patrol. By May 10th there were twenty-one destroyers at sea on blockade duty between Bone and Malta.

At dusk on May 8th, the *Fervis* (Captain A. F. Pugsley), with the *Nubian* and *Paladin*, bombarded the town of Kelibia and shipping lying off it. They obtained many hits in the target area. The enemy replied with two small guns, but without result. Kelibia was again bombarded at dawn on the 9th, after which the three ships resumed their patrol. That afternoon they came upon a small boat under sail with a rubber dinghy in tow. The boat contained seventeen Germans and Italian soldiers, who were made prisoners. The occupant of the rubber dinghy was Sergeant Pilot Carver of the Royal Air Force, who had been shot down off Cape Bon on the evening of May 8th and taken in tow by the enemy next morning. His gratitude at being saved can be imagined.

The *Laforey* (Captain R. M. J. Hutton), with the *Tartar* (Commander St. J. R. J. Tyrwhitt), *Loyal* (Lieutenant-Commander H. E. F. Tweedie), *Bicester* (Lieutenant-Commander S. W. F. Bennetts), *Oakley* (Lieutenant-Commander T. A. Pack-Beresford), and *Zetland* (Lieutenant J. W. Wilkinson), sailed from Bone at 8 a.m. on May 8th. That evening they were detected by enemy aircraft, Heinkels being seen at a great height. Soon after 7 p.m. they were bombed, the *Laforey* and *Bicester* being straddled, though not damaged. Some “snooping” aircraft were driven off by gunfire before dark, and at 9.15 p.m. the three “Hunt” class destroyers *Zetland*, *Oakley* and *Bicester* parted company for their patrol area. They were soon in action, for at about 1.10 a.m. on May 9th, about thirty miles north-east of Cape Bon, they sighted a dark shape at a distance of

about 1,000 yards. It was soon made out to be a large landing craft, which, on being fired upon, burst into flames and presently exploded. It was crowded with troops, and also contained oil and ammunition. That same afternoon the *Zetland* and *Oakley* picked up two German gunners who were trying to reach Sicily in an aircraft dinghy, while five more Germans were taken off a raft. Three motor-boats containing enemy troops were later found in the Gulf of Tunis.

On the night of May 8th-9th the *Laforey*, *Tartar* and *Loyal* patrolled to the northward of Cape Bon. Just before 2 a.m. two enemy ships were sighted, and fourteen minutes later fire was opened. Star-shell and searchlights were used to advantage, and within a few minutes both vessels were blazing. Tanks could be seen on the upper deck of one. By 2.35 they were being abandoned, and ammunition was exploding at frequent intervals. They were medium-sized armed merchantmen fully laden with petrol and munitions. A few survivors were rescued.

The Commander-in-Chief signalled his congratulations to the *Laforey*, adding that she had obtained "a right and left" this time.

At daylight on the 9th the *Laforey's* party sighted various small boats under sail, some with rafts in tow. Unlike the Germans, who had wantonly fired upon our survivors in the water during the evacuation from Greece and Crete, Captain Hutton felt he could not kill the occupants. It was too cold-blooded. The prisoners were collected by the *Loyal* and *Tartar*, who captured fifty-two between them. Shortly after noon on this day the *Laforey* was under fire from an enemy shore battery. She replied at long range, her fire being very accurate. More prisoners were picked up from boats during the afternoon, and at 5.15 p.m. the *Laforey* and *Loyal* bombarded an enemy anti-aircraft battery near Sidi Daud, on the west side of the Cape Bon peninsula. Many bursts were seen around the target. At 5.27 the enemy replied with very accurate fire, straddling the *Laforey* at once, and hitting her in the engine-room with one round of the third salvo. She made smoke and steamed off out of range, zigzagging as she went, and though under fire for another six minutes was not hit again.

Lieutenant-Commander Tweedie, in the *Loyal*, followed the *Laforey* out, covering her with smoke. The *Loyal* was a fine sight, pouring out black smoke from funnel and white smoke from her stern with the guns of her main armament flashing as she engaged the enemy.

The *Laforey's* engine-room, meanwhile, had become filled with escaping steam and presently had to be abandoned. A number of steam pipes had been cut, and there was considerable further damage. Her speed gradually dropped until she finally had to stop to clear the engine-room of steam. Those of her engine-room department were able to go below again, and, by means best known to themselves, managed “to overcome the difficulties” so that the ship was able to steam at twenty knots. Captain Hutton, who was not the type of man to leave his patrol ground provided his damaged ship could steam at all, remained on patrol for the night, and finally reached Malta for repairs on the evening of May 10th. No doubt realizing the *Laforey's* disappointment at being temporarily out of action at so critical a time, the Commander-in-Chief again congratulated the *Laforey* on her great work and the fine efforts of her engine-room staff. The ship was not *hors de combat* for very long. One could trust the fiercely energetic Captain Hutton for that.

The weather moderated, and the work of mopping up the enemy at sea continued without intermission.

An American P.T. boat, 206, with three M.T.Bs. from Bone, torpedoed an enemy supply ship in Ras Idda anchorage, on the eastern side of the Cape Bon peninsula. The vessel blew up. Other reports coming in told of the *Tetcott* (Lieutenant-Commander Richard Rycroft), dealing with parties of the enemy in boats, and of the *Bicester* taking thirty Germans from a motor-boat fifteen miles south-south-west of Zembra Island, off the Gulf of Tunis. They were mostly parachute troops, very clean, smart-looking and fit, who said they had been cut off by the advance of the Allies and had decided to make for Sicily. Incidentally, they were found to be well supplied with British chocolate and cigarettes.



On the night of May 11th, M.T.Bs. 316, 265 and 309 had another run for their money when they captured various boat-loads of escapees and returned in triumph with 117 of them. The *Beaufort*, *Exmoor* and *Pindos*, too, took 153 prisoners, mostly Germans, trying to escape in fishing boats. Captain J. W. Eaton, in the *Eskimo*, which was in company from time to time with the *Lookout* (Lieutenant-Commander A. G. Forman), *Whaddon* (Lieutenant-Commander J. B. Palmer), *Eggesford* (Lieutenant-Commander D. W. Austin), *Lamerton* (Lieutenant-Commander C. R. Purse), *Lauderdale* (Lieutenant-Commander G. D. Pound), and *Wilton* (Lieutenant-Commander M. R. Collins), had various adventures. On May 11th a number of small boats yielded thirty-one prisoners, and on the 12th the "Hunt" class destroyers came under accurate fire from an enemy shore battery, while some more prisoners were collected from small boats. The *Lamerton* took seventeen Italian officers and men from a fishing boat, while the *Lauderdale* intercepted some other boats off the Gulf of Tunis. One of these contained that rare prize, a German General, Chief of Staff to the 5th Panzer Division. On the 13th, they sighted a small boat off Plane Island, the occupants of which waved a white flag. It was investigated by the *Lookout*, and contained a dozen young Germans in charge of a warrant officer. They had with them "one rather venerable Italian" who was to act as an interpreter if ever they reached Italy. "I regret this patrol did not yield more substantial results," Captain Eaton wrote, "but I feel it was of high nuisance value and strongly discouraged enemy yachtsmen."

Of May 12th, the date on which Axis forces in the Cape Bon peninsula finally capitulated, Captain Pugsley of the *Jervis* wrote: "The remainder of the day was spent collecting the remaining 'Kelibia Regatta' entrants, ninety-six prisoners in all being taken, all except thirteen being Germans."

On this same day, the 12th, the *Aldenham*, *Hursley* and the Greek *Kanaris* had their own little sideshow when they investigated the island of Zembra. The following account is compiled from that of the *Kanaris*:





From the bridge of  
H.M.S. *Orion*.  
Bombs bursting on  
Pantellaria.

On receiving orders to act independently, the Greek destroyer lowered her motor-boat shortly before 7 a.m. and sent it ashore. A number of German and Italian troops were thought to be in occupation of Zembra, and what appeared to be a white flag was hoisted as our ships approached. On its southern side the island falls down into a steep ravine, so the *Kanaris* had full command of the situation with her 4-inch guns. As a preliminary, however, she contented herself by directing a burst of pompom fire into the hillside. This encouraged a large number of the enemy to come out of hiding. Dribbling down in ones and twos with arms uplifted, they were taken charge of on the beach by a landing party of Greek seamen.

A German surgeon-lieutenant and an officer were on the beach to arrange the surrender. They said that about 100 men were prepared to follow them. In due course, more and more would-be evacuees came reluctantly out of hiding, and were lined up for embarkation. Two girls were with them, and were taken off as well. The first people to reach the island from Tunis had been these two ladies, Italian and of doubtful virtue, accompanied by two soldiers. They had been promenading in Tunis with a German on May 7th, they said, when the Americans entered the town and their escort disappeared. Caught in the general flight, they found themselves in a boat with two other Germans, eventually to reach Zembra at 5 a.m. on May 8th, after rowing for twelve hours. These first arrivals were supplemented by others, until there were well over 100. Anyhow, it is on record that the *Aldenham*, *Hursley* and *Kanaris* reached Malta on May 13th with 154 prisoners and the two females.

Three days after the Axis surrender the *Laforey* investigated Plane Island. Nothing was seen during the first inspection; but as the ship withdrew a man was seen sneaking along the foreshore. Closing the island again, Captain Hutton put an armed party ashore, and the sailors ferreted thirteen Germans and ten Italians out of their various foxholes. They had three small boats, in which they had hoped to escape to Sicily. The Germans had been true to type in refusing to allow the Italians

to share the living quarters in the lighthouse, which was found to contain quite an arsenal of small arms and ammunition.

One remembers the liberation of the small French island of Galita, some sixty miles off the Tunisian coast in the direction of Sardinia, on which at one time the enemy had maintained a lookout post or wireless station with a small garrison.

Commander R. A. Allan, R.N.V.R., in command of one of the M.T.B. flotillas, finding he had time to spare, decided to visit the island in one of the craft under his command. Flaunting their largest ensign, they cautiously entered the little harbour with guns ready for action. But the enemy had already decamped, and presently a small boat came pulling off with the French mayor, complete with tricolour sash, and a few of the leading inhabitants. They came on board, to be told in Allan's best French that Galita was liberated. The visitors cheered wildly, and celebrated the deliverance as the Navy thought advisable. It was a successful party according to all accounts, with much fraternization and back-slapping. In the course of it the leading French inhabitant threw his hat overboard and fell in after it, having to be rescued dripping from the sea. Nobody seemed to mind, least of all the victim. Another tot was pressed upon him to keep the cold out.

There was a more formal "liberation" some days later, with the local population in their gala attire cheering and welcoming a small party of officers and men with flags and the local band. The Navy, it seems, provided a guard of honour as the Tricolour was ceremoniously hoisted, and this was followed by speeches and more cheering. Galita is famous for its lobsters. It was also able to provide wine and cognac. The banquet which followed was described by one of the guests as "monumental."

The Navy's operation "Retribution" to avenge the withdrawal of the Army from Greece and Crete never developed into an attempt at wholesale evacuation. Only small, isolated parties of stragglers sought safety by sea, to find that the sea was not theirs. In all, some 1,000 prisoners were taken afloat and on May 13th Sir Andrew Cunningham signalled to his ships:

"The campaign in North Africa has concluded with the

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surrender or destruction of all Axis forces. It is a tribute to the work of our light forces that even in the desperate circumstances in which the enemy found themselves, no real attempt was made to evacuate by sea, and that such few as hazarded the attempt were speedily rounded up by ships on patrol. I have watched with satisfaction the progressively good work performed in harassing the enemy at sea during the last weeks, and in particular the good work in the last phase which has enabled a large number of craft of different types to work by day and by night in close proximity to an enemy coast without confusion and with a high degree of success. I congratulate you all on a difficult and arduous job well performed.”

### III

Though the North African campaign was ended, there was still much to be done by the Navy.

The French naval dockyard at Ferryville, near Bizerta, had been heavily bombed by the Allies and systematically destroyed and blocked by the enemy. Nevertheless, Bizerta could still be used to a limited extent, and the first convoy of tank landing craft from Bone arrived on May 11th, two days after the complete occupation. The Army had still to be supplied and the many prisoners evacuated, and on the 12th it was reported that Bizerta was handling 1,000 tons a day from coasters and landing craft. The port, which was run by a Port Party of the United States Navy, and where Commodore Oliver, the British Senior Officer Inshore Squadron, had hoisted his broad pendant, was being used by tank landing ships and infantry landing ships by May 13th.

The Germans had sunk twenty-six ships in the narrow entrance from the Avant Port to the Goulet. They included large liners, destroyers, crane-lighters and other vessels, and formed a complete block, like a wall. A team of salvage experts of the United States Navy sent up by Commodore W. A. Sullivan, U.S.N., got to work, and in spite of a four-knot tidal stream gradually opened up a channel with explosives.

Within a month it was deep enough for the entry of 10,000-ton "Liberty" ships.

Before convoys could safely be passed through the Mediterranean clear water had to be guaranteed by the minesweepers. To start at the beginning, however, the approaches to Malta had been systematically mined by the enemy. Much intensive sweeping had to be done there from February, 1943, onwards before the island could be considered safe as an operational base for warships, or for the arrival of the first convoys from Alexandria in March. This exacting work was carried out by the fleet minesweepers of the 14th Flotilla, together with minesweeping trawlers, motor minesweepers and motor launches.

But the Galita and Sicilian Channels, together with the area to the east of the Cape Bon peninsula, had been heavily mined as well. The fleet minesweepers of the 12th and 13th Flotillas were regularly employed as convoy escorts during the earlier phases of the Tunisian campaign; but in the first few days of May they were brought up to full strength and reinforced by trawlers of the 20th and 77th Auxiliary Minesweeping Groups, motor minesweepers and motor launches. The 14th Flotilla was also sent south from Malta to sweep a coastwise channel from Sousse to Tripoli. The operations started on May 9th under the direction of Captain J. W. Boutwood and Commander L. J. S. Ede, and went on continuously until finished. It was an arduous undertaking.

Without going into too much detail, the task involved the steaming of about 2,500 miles by each flotilla to clear a channel of about 600 miles. An appreciable handicap was provided by strong tidal streams, not always running in convenient directions, while some hundreds of the enemy's anti-sweeping devices parted the sweep-wires and caused delay. Apart from many explosive devices laid by the enemy, some 257 contact mines were swept up and destroyed, the work being completed by June 7th with the loss of His Majesty's Motor Minesweeper 89, and damage to H.M.S. *Fantome*, whose stern was blown off.

## “RETRIBUTION”

By clearing this waterway through the Mediterranean, the unremitting labours of those little ships shortened the distance from the United Kingdom to Egypt by about 6,000 miles. Though the list that follows may not be fully complete, the names of the fleet minesweepers should be placed on record:

### 12th Flotilla

*Acute, Albacore, Cadmus, Circe, Espiegle, Fantome.*

### 13th Flotilla

*Brixham, Bude, Clacton, Felixstowe, Polruan, Rhyl, Rothesay, Stornoway.*

### 14th Flotilla

*Boston, Cromarty, Poole, Romney, Seaham, Whitehaven.*

It was no longer necessary for convoys to use the long, alternative route round the Cape of Good Hope, and the first through convoy from the west was in the Straits of Gibraltar on May 17th, passed Cape Bon four days later, and reached Alexandria on May 26th. The first convoy to reach Malta unopposed since 1940 arrived there on May 24th.

For this fine service the minesweepers received a signal expressing the appreciation of the Admiralty. Another signal was made to them by the Commander-in-Chief, who mentioned what had been done and said that the opening of this route so soon after the fall of Tunisia had been due to their good work. He congratulated every officer and man in the fleet sweepers, trawlers, motor minesweepers, motor launches and harbour defence motor launches who had contributed to the success of this formidable minesweeping achievement.

Now that the sea was open, there remained the islands of Pantellaria, Lampedusa and Linosa, which still contained Italian garrisons. They were required for use as bases for fighter aircraft. Pantellaria, about 150 miles to the westward of Malta, had been an Italian possession since 1860. A small, volcanic island about the size of the Isle of Wight, Mussolini, in 1937, had decided to convert it into a second Gibraltar for the purpose of dominating the Sicilian Strait and to counterbalance Malta. The island is mountainous and



rocky; but it was well fortified and provided with an airfield. Pens for submarines and E-boats had been constructed, while the harbour was commanded by batteries well concealed in the hillsides overlooking it.

Any naval craft remaining in Pantellaria would still be a menace to our convoys passing through the Mediterranean to Malta and beyond, so an M.T.B. patrol was established off the island on the night of May 11th-12th. It began to be heavily bombed by aircraft with a view to its eventual occupation, and the first naval bombardment of the harbour area was carried out by the cruiser *Orion* (Captain G. C. P. Menzies), and the destroyers *Isis* and *Petard* in the early morning of May 13th.

Before dawn on May 23rd, patrolling between Pantellaria and the western end of Sicily, the *Laforey* and *Lookout* met an enemy supply ship. They opened fire and obtained immediate hits, the vessel catching fire and rolling over, presently to sink. Closing the wreckage, the two destroyers picked up the captain and crew of eight from a small boat, to discover that their ship had carried supplies to Pantellaria and was on her return voyage to Marsala and Trapani.

Further naval bombardments of Pantellaria of varying duration and intensity were carried out by the *Orion*, *Petard* and *Troubridge* on the night of May 30th-31st, and by the cruiser *Penelope*, Captain G. D. Belben, with the *Petard* and *Paladin* during the late afternoon of June 1st.

The night following, Captain Pugsley, in the *Jervis*, with the Greek destroyer *Queen Olga*, met an enemy convoy off Cape Spartivento, near the toe of Italy. He engaged at once. One merchant vessel was set on fire and blew up, while another was sunk. An escorting destroyer was also driven ashore in flames, and a torpedo-boat sent to the bottom. The *Jervis* was congratulated by the Commander-in-Chief, who said it was a pleasure to see that she was keeping up her old form.

Pantellaria had further naval poundings from the *Orion*, *Paladin* and *Troubridge* on the night of June 2nd-3rd, by the destroyers *Isis* and *Ilex* at dawn on June 3rd, and by the cruiser

*Newfoundland* (Captain W. R. Slayter), flying the flag of Rear-Admiral C. H. J. Harcourt, with the *Paladin* and *Troubridge*, at dawn on June 5th.

A full-scale test of the Pantellaria defences took place on June 8th, General Eisenhower and Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham being present on board the cruiser *Aurora* (Commodore W. G. Agnew). The other ships taking part were the cruisers *Newfoundland*, *Orion*, *Penelope*, and *Euryalus* (Captain E. W. Bush), with the destroyers *Laforey*, *Fervis*, *Tartar*, *Nubian*, *Troubridge*, *Lookout*, and *Whaddon*. The attack was pressed in to close range, the destroyers steaming to within a mile of the harbour, and a force of three M.T.Bs. under the command of Lieutenant J. B. Sturgeon, R.N.V.R., moving so close inshore that they came under rifle fire.

It had been hoped that the heavy bombing of Pantellaria, which had continued for days, might force the island to surrender. The bombing was most effective, in that it caused the Italian guns' crews to keep to their deep shelters, and allowed the bombarding ships to close in to decisive ranges to knock out individual batteries. However, bombing did not bring about the capitulation of the garrison, and a combined naval, air and military assault was arranged for June 11th.

While bombing continued on an increasing scale, Rear-Admiral Harcourt's force of four cruisers, *Newfoundland*, *Aurora*, *Orion* and *Penelope*, with the destroyers *Laforey*, *Loyal*, *Lookout*, *Troubridge*, *Fervis*, *Tartar*, *Nubian* and the Greek *Queen Olga*, would open up a preliminary covering fire for the assault troops. Rear-Admiral R. R. McGrigor was the Naval Commander for the assault, and the first flights of landing craft from his force, covered by destroyers, were timed to touch down on three beaches near the harbour and town at noon.

Long before dawn the warships and the vessels and craft containing the assault force were converging on their objective. The cruisers and destroyers went to action stations. The sea was calm, with poor visibility, and when Pantellaria was first sighted after daybreak it was partly shrouded in mist and the smoke and dust clouds of heavy bombing. Large groups of

Allied aircraft flew over the ships on their way to the island, and the rain of bombs continued. The ships had fighter cover overhead in the shape of Spitfires of the R.A.F.

By 10 a.m. the assault ships had reached their lowering position, and landing craft had started to form up and move in towards the beaches. The cruisers and destroyers had divided into two groups, one on each flank of the landing places. The smoke over the island had begun to clear, but very soon thickened again as more Allied aircraft swept in and attacked. A few German aircraft appeared and were fired upon. They dropped bombs near the ships and landing craft, though without any result.

At 11 a.m., punctual to the minute, the covering ships opened fire on their pre-selected targets, the enemy batteries, which were soon being hit. There was considerable retaliation from the shore, some shell dropping close to the *Newfoundland*. Firing continued, and at about 11.30 the destroyers steamed in to closer range. Eight minutes later the *Nubian* and *Lookout* reported a white flag flying at the signal station ashore, though nothing could be seen of it from further out at sea. Bombing and naval gunfire continued, the target areas and large parts of the island being invisible in masses of smoke and dust.

The landing craft were close inshore, and the first flights touched down at 11.57, to be followed by others. There was still no definite news of surrender. More and more craft moved in and landed their troops. There was little or no opposition on the beaches. Allied aircraft were bombing the defences in the hills inland. More white flags were flying ashore, though these could not be taken to mean that the whole island had surrendered. At about 12.45, however, a signal was received via Malta from the Italian Admiral commanding at Pantellaria: "Pantellaria begs surrender, due lack of water."

Soon after 1 p.m., as all the beaches had been taken, the naval bombardment ceased. The surrender, however, was not general, and once or twice during the afternoon fire had to be reopened at enemy batteries, while two Italian landing craft trying to escape had also to be dealt with. There was a German dive-bombing attack by twenty-seven aircraft at about 3.30,



The Greek destroyer *Queen Olga* close inshore, bombarding coastal batteries at Pantellaria. Shell from H.M.S. *Orion* is also seen bursting on targets ashore.



their bombs near-missing two ships, but at least one of the attackers being shot down. On land the troops were making good progress against little opposition, and by 4 p.m. tanks and field artillery had been landed and Army Headquarters was moved ashore.

As already mentioned, the first white flag had been seen ashore at 11.38 a.m. It seemed that this local surrender in the beach defences preceded the capitulation of the whole island by about an hour, and that even so word could not be sent to some of the outlying batteries. What caused the surrender was not the bombing, but the sight of British bayonets approaching in the landing craft under the guns of the Royal Navy. Considerably to the disappointment of our troops, the Italians came out of their defences and surrendered without a fight. According to those who inspected the defences later, by no means all the guns in the batteries were out of action, though their communication systems were in a very bad state. The reason given for surrender, too, shortage of water, was a convenient excuse. There was no lack of water, and a water boat sent for the use of our troops was not required.

So Pantellaria passed into Allied hands, some 2,800 Italian naval and military prisoners being removed that day, leaving a considerable number still to be evacuated.

His work at Pantellaria finished, Rear-Admiral Harcourt moved off with his four cruisers and all his destroyers except the *Tartar* and *Troubridge* to Lampedusa, about 100 miles to the southward. The *Tartar* was left at Pantellaria with Rear-Admiral McGrigor, while the *Troubridge* escorted landing craft with troops to Lampedusa.

The island was reached at about 11.30 p.m. It, too, was being heavily bombed by aircraft, and twice during the night of June 11th-12th, and at frequent intervals throughout the following day, it was bombarded from the sea also. Large fires were started. The enemy batteries came into action during the early morning and a few splinters fell on board the *Newfoundland*. Bombers continued to plaster the island, and during the afternoon a dramatic incident occurred when a

sergeant pilot of the R.A.F. was forced to land his aircraft on Lampedusa airfield because of engine trouble. The Italians wished to surrender to him, but at that moment Allied bombers appeared overhead and started to plaster the aerodrome, whereupon all hands, including the sergeant pilot, took cover. Returning to his aircraft after the raid, the sergeant pilot got it into working order, took off, and flew back to Tunisia.

By about 6.15 p.m. the *Penelope* and *Fervis* had started to carry out another bombardment, when they reported that there were white flags flying ashore. Leaflets had already been dropped on the island counselling surrender, as resistance was futile. An ultimatum was now sent demanding surrender on pain of further bombing on the morrow, and by 6.40 the *Lookout* was approaching the little harbour. She lowered her whaler at 7.20 and sent it in with an officer, a Press correspondent and thirteen armed seamen. About half an hour later came her radio message: "Have accepted surrender of Lampedusa from second-in-command, Capitana of Marines Marecia Oberisio, who fully agrees to terms, as Governor of island is thirty minutes walk inland."

The terms were unconditional surrender, and before long, when the *Troubridge's* landing craft with the troops had reached the shore, the garrison of 4,000 to 5,000 men, and the Governor, were safely under guard as prisoners of war. Later that evening Lampedusa was attacked by a strong force of JU.88's, the *Lookout* being dive-bombed twenty-five times. Beyond some broken crockery and woodwork shaken loose, she suffered no damage.

The *Newfoundland* and *Nubian* appeared off the neighbouring small island of Linosa early next morning, June 13th. White flags were flying, and there was no fighting. The *Nubian* was sent in to accept the surrender, and 169 naval and military personnel became prisoners. Commander Holland-Martin reported, *inter alia*, that the prisoners were dirty, of low morale, sea-sick, and eager to surrender, except the Commandant, who was in bed, but agreed to surrender when he found his Army had been captured. The inhabitants were friendly.

The unluckiest prisoner had been married the day before, and his wife was due to have a baby on the morrow.

With which slight note of ribaldry, the last of Mussolini's possessions south of Italy passed into the hands of the Allies.

IV

It was in June that the King, travelling by air, visited Algiers during his fortnight's visit to the Army and Navy in North Africa and Egypt. His Majesty was travelling incognito as General Lyon, and only a few of us knew of the impending visit. Nevertheless, the news of his arrival was known all over Algiers within a few hours, some of the more discerning citizens having recognized him in his car. During his heavy programme at Algiers, the King spent one forenoon inspecting some thousands of officers and men of the British and American warships and merchantmen in the port thickly massed on the Quai Transatlantique. It was a memorable sight.

From the naval point of view, however, the climax of the tour was the King's visit to Malta on June 20th. He travelled there from Tripoli in the cruiser *Aurora* (Commodore W. G. Agnew), escorted by destroyers. The inhabitants of the island had been warned that something important was impending, and had hung out their flags in readiness. And when the *Aurora* steamed into the Grand Harbour with His Majesty standing on a special platform, there were dense fringes of wildly cheering people against the skyline clustered on every accessible vantage point on the bomb-scarred battlements and the roofs of houses. It was the first time a sovereign had landed on the island for thirty-two years. But at a time like this, after Malta's three years' ordeal of bombing, with the Axis defeated in Tunisia, Pantellaria captured, and the invasion of Sicily or Italy undoubtedly impending, the visit had a far greater significance. The tens of thousands of citizens, always emotional, were almost crazy with joy. As one eye-witness said, the King's arrival and tour of the island produced one of the most spontaneous and genuine demonstrations of fervent loyalty and affection ever seen anywhere.



## CHAPTER V

## OPERATION "HUSKY." SICILY

## I

THE invasion of Sicily, which started on July 10th, 1943, was described as the greatest amphibious operation ever undertaken up till that time. Speaking on July 29th, President Roosevelt revealed that the initial force landed consisted of 160,000 men—Americans, British, Canadians and French—with 14,000 vehicles, 600 tanks and 1,800 guns. This force, he added, was followed every day and every night by thousands of reinforcements.

Nearly 2,000 vessels, large and small, warships and merchantmen, took part in the first assaults on the beaches. No fewer than 3,266 ships, vessels and craft of all types, fighting ships and merchant vessels, were concerned in the operations as a whole. They ranged from battleships, aircraft-carriers and cruisers to landing craft and motor-torpedo-boats; from large merchantmen of the liner types used for carrying infantry to the little ships with stores and oil fuel. They flew the ensigns, not only of Britain and the United States, but of practically all the United Nations. Units of the Royal Canadian, Royal Indian, and of the Dutch, Polish and Greek Navies participated in the widespread naval operations.

The collection of all these vessels for the invasion of Sicily presented a serious problem, and entailed a heavy drain on the shipping resources of the Allies at a very critical time. Ships came to the Mediterranean from many parts of the world—Britain, the United States, the Middle East and the Cape of Good Hope.

The patient, detailed work of preparation and organization had gone on for months beforehand at Algiers by a combined

British and American staff representative of all the services. The operation had to be planned in every detail, and the convoy routes and escorts arranged. Naval forces had to be provided for minesweeping ahead of the convoys as they moved into their anchorages; to cover the actual landings with close-range gunfire; for defending the landing ships and craft against attack by enemy aircraft. There had to be other naval covering forces to protect the inshore flotillas against attack by surface ships or submarines, and a strong force of capital ships to deal with the Italian fleet if it came to sea to give battle.

Fresh troops were sent out from Britain and the United States. Not all of them came from Tunisia. Viewed dispassionately, the task of transporting these thousands of men with their equipment, guns, tanks, vehicles and supplies over thousands of miles of sea, and of landing them simultaneously by night on a number of open beaches spread over about eighty miles of enemy coastline, was a stupendous one.

This, then, in briefest outline, was the task that had to be performed by the ships and men of the Allied Navies and Merchant Navies working together under the naval command of Sir Andrew Cunningham, with the late Sir Bertram Ramsay and Vice-Admiral H. Kent Hewitt of the United States Navy as the working heads of the Eastern and Western Task Forces respectively. The subordinate Naval Commanders off the beaches in charge of the actual landings were Rear-Admiral Rhoderick Robert McGrigor, Rear-Admiral Sir Philip Louis Vian and Rear-Admiral Thomas Hope Troubridge, British, with Rear-Admiral Alan G. Kirk, Rear-Admiral John L. Hall, Jr., and Rear-Admiral R. L. Conolly, all of the U.S. Navy.

Days before the operation was timed to start, ships and convoys began to converge upon the Central Mediterranean. They came from the west and from the east, all moving according to schedule, all steaming at carefully prearranged speeds to arrive at certain positions at certain times, neither earlier nor later. This movement of a large number of vessels entailed the working out of much intricate detail. So did the provision of the naval escorts, and their relief for re-fuelling.

We anxiously watched the coloured symbols indicating convoys plotted every few hours on the huge chart of the Mediterranean stretching over the whole of one wall of the naval war room at Algiers. More symbols indicated individual ships and U-boats. The convoys upon which so much depended were coming nearer and nearer to their destinations. Messages were coming in every few minutes, and their purport translated to the chart by Wren officers. On that huge rectangle of linoleum, with the sea in brown and the land filled in with colour, the situation was developing before our eyes.

There was an atmosphere of suspense and tension. D-day, H-hour, and the ultimate targets for the expedition, had naturally been kept a dead secret. But how, we asked ourselves, could the movements of this great mass of shipping remain unknown to the enemy? And if he knew of those converging convoys, as seemed more than likely, had he also guessed where the blow was about to fall?

However, with the whole south coast of Europe from which to choose, there were many places where the Allies might strike. As it happened, the enemy was to be caught, as one sailor described it, "with his trousers at half-mast."

## II

By July 4th an Advanced Command Post had been established in Malta, and General Eisenhower and Sir Andrew Cunningham had both reached the island with their staffs. The Commander-in-Chief's staff worked at Lascaris, the battlements of which overlooked the Custom House steps, with the Grand Harbour and all its shipping and the bombed cities of Vittoriosa and Senglea beyond. A tunnel with a full range of offices and a large war room had been hewn out of the solid sandstone as a protection against air raids. With its dampness, "potted air," peculiar smell and complete lack of daylight, it was not a really pleasant place in which to work. However, one was told that it was far better than the tunnel

at Gibraltar from which the first landings in North Africa had been directed.

Outside was all the fierce heat and brassy glare of Malta in summer, with the white dust from its many bombed and shattered buildings, and its myriads of sandflies which delighted in feasting upon newcomers and causing them itching and excruciating nights. Sandfly fever struck many, to leave them enervated and irritable.

One can never forget the night of July 9th-10th, 1943. Everything was ready. The convoys were approaching Sicily, with the ships and landing craft based upon Malta embarking their troops, vehicles and stores and making ready for sea. Then, after days of wonderfully hot, fine weather with a sea as calm as a village pond, the elements seemed suddenly to turn against us. It started to blow hard, raising a choppy sea. There were some dubious faces. Should the operation be put off for twenty-four hours, some people asked themselves. Sir Andrew Cunningham decided otherwise, and during the afternoon the Malta contingents started to leave harbour. One remembers watching them as they drew out of the lee of the island, the smaller landing craft and others butting and burying their bows in the short sea with the spray flying over them in sheets. One pitied their military occupants, who were not inured to so rude a buffeting.

As the afternoon gave way to evening, and evening to night, the sixty-mile gap between Malta and Sicily became crowded with shipping. Watching the chart criss-crossed with a tangle of lines showing the tracks of convoys, squadrons of flotillas converging on their objectives, imagination began to run riot. There was moonlight, one remembers. All precautions had been taken, and we had the measure of the U-boats. But supposing half a dozen enemy submarines with determined captains, or perhaps a flotilla or two of destroyers or E-boats, did get in amongst that concourse of shipping moving without lights to a prearranged and inflexible programme? One imagined our smaller craft pounding and crashing against that strong north-westerly wind and steep, breaking sea, though

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there was comfort even in this. The Italians were not conspicuous as bad-weather sailors, and, regarding a landing as impossible, might keep their small craft in harbour and themselves in bed.

We also spent the greater part of a sleepless night in that dank tunnel at Malta, wondering, waiting, hoping—visiting the war room at intervals for the latest information. Nothing came through. There was wireless silence. Everything seemed to be going according to plan, though it was realized that the wild weather must inevitably delay some of the smaller landing craft from reaching their various rendezvous and “touching down” on the beaches at their prearranged times.

On the eve of the operation, Sir Andrew Cunningham had issued an inspiring message to all ships and naval authorities taking part. It ran as follows:

“We are about to embark on the most momentous enterprise of the war—striking for the first time at the enemy in his own land.

“2. Success means the opening of the ‘Second Front’ with all that implies, and the first move towards the rapid and decisive defeat of our enemies.

“3. Our object is clear and our primary duty is to place this vast expedition ashore in the minimum time and subsequently to maintain our military and air forces as they drive relentlessly forward into enemy territory.

“4. In the light of this duty, great risks must be and are to be accepted. The safety of our ships and all distracting considerations are to be relegated to second place, or disregarded as the accomplishment of our primary duty may require.

“5. On every commanding officer, officer and rating rests the individual and personal duty of ensuring that no flinching in determination or failure of effort on his own part will hamper this great enterprise.

“6. I rest confident in the resolution, skill and endurance of you all to whom this momentous enterprise is entrusted.”

Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay’s message to his ships of the Eastern Task Force deserves also to be placed upon record:

"The capture of the island of Sicily has been decided upon in order to facilitate the passage of Allied shipping through the Mediterranean, and as a further stage in the defeat of the Axis Powers. We are therefore about to take part in a combined operation, the success of which will have a far-reaching effect on the future course of the war. It is well known that combined operations are among the most difficult and hazardous operations of war, requiring the closest co-operation of all arms and services and a high degree of individual gallantry, determination and resource. Awkward and unexpected situations will arise and we must expect and accept casualties, but there must be no slackening of effort. You must continually bear in mind the fact that the Army are helpless and entirely dependent upon us until we establish them on shore. We did not let them down when they were retreating at Dunkirk, in Greece or Crete, and we will not let them down now when they are advancing. We have the inestimable advantage on this occasion of being associated with the veteran troops of the Eighth Army, and with the Canadian Army: we have overwhelming strength in the air; we are on the crest of the wave while the enemy is in the trough, and we have the opportunity now to hasten his downfall. I count, therefore, on every man to do his utmost. Good luck to you all and God speed."

## III

Historians will write the full story of the landings in Sicily, and of the subsequent fighting for the capture of the island. The account that follows describes in briefest outline the work of the Allied Navies, though even that is incomplete because the names of ships were not then allowed to be mentioned in the communiqués, while many of the landing craft and smaller ships engaged close inshore in the actual work of landing bore numbers only.

Before dawn on July 10th, two British cruisers, accompanied by destroyers and M.T.Ss., bombarded Catania as a diversion. It was the idea to simulate an intended landing and to keep



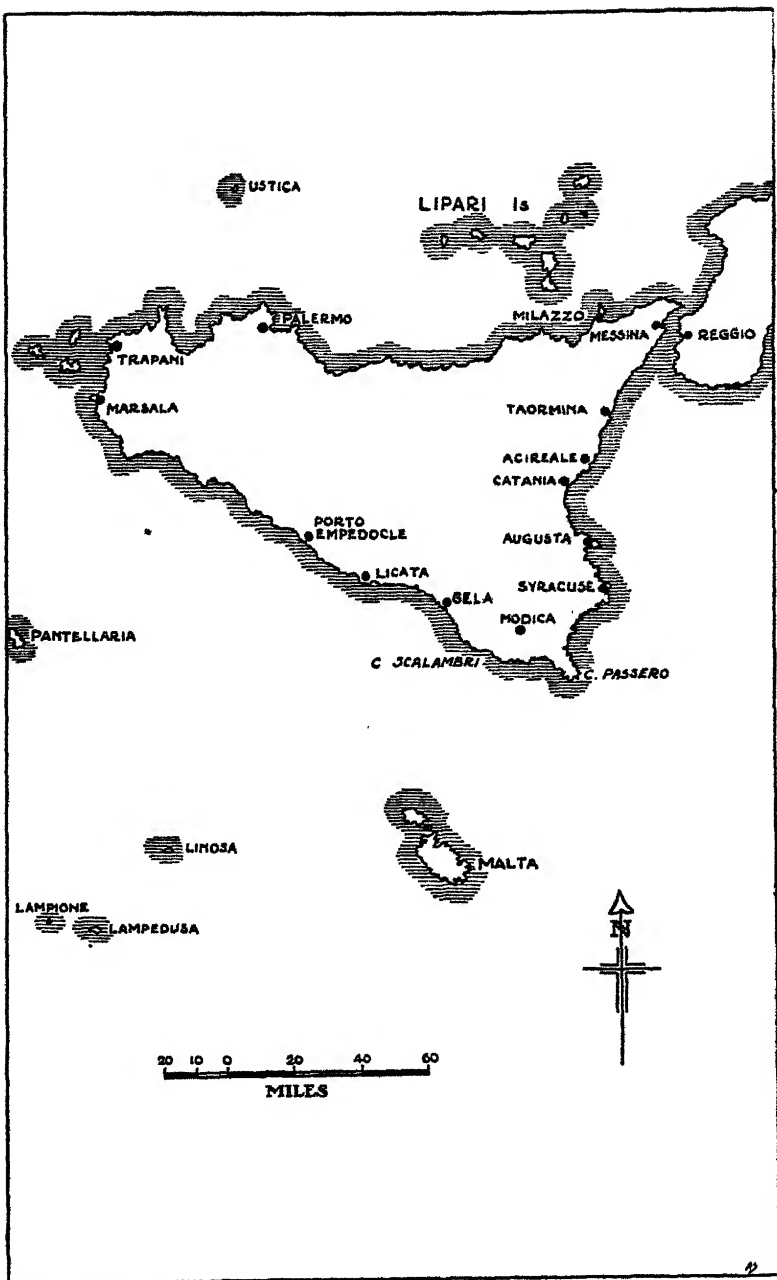
strong forces of enemy troops guarding the beaches near Catania and away from the real Allied landings further south. The diversion succeeded in its object.

First reports of the British landings began to trickle through to the Advanced Command Post at Malta soon after 4.30 a.m. They had begun at 2.45, covering fire from cruisers, monitors, destroyers, gunboats and other naval units engaging and neutralizing batteries commanding the beaches and the anchorages off-shore for the larger ships. Preceded in some cases by commandos and sappers to capture batteries and clear minefields in the beach approaches, the British troops landed at ten places between Cape Murro di Porco, just south of Syracuse, to Cape Correnti, some four miles south-west of Cape Passero, the south-eastern point of Sicily. In the six-mile bight to the west of Cape Correnti were landed two brigades of Canadians and two Royal Marine commandos.

Further west, the men of the United States Seventh Army, under covering gunfire from the sea, were also landing at ten different places—Cape Scalambri, Scoglitti, Gela and Licata—spread over a distance of about forty miles.

In the British beaches there was little enemy resistance, though some of the coastal batteries were annoying. By 5 a.m. the first troops and some tanks had been landed, and within half an hour other convoys were moving in. By 7.30 troops had started to advance and artillery was being put ashore. More personnel, more tanks, guns, vehicles and stores followed. By the middle of the morning the success of the British and Canadian landings was already assured. There was slight enemy air activity during the day, fighter bombers appearing in the British sector to cause some casualties among the landing craft and their personnel.

Here is the story of L.C.I.(L.)—Landing Craft Infantry, Large—179, as told by her commanding officer, Lieutenant William T. Skeels, of Blackheath, who before the war had worked with the Port of London Authority. Her first lieutenant, John C. Buckland, was from Hardforth, near Manchester, and had once been a salesman. Her coxswain, Leading Seaman



SICILY.

Raymond C. Roberts, of Palmers Green, London, had originally been a lorry driver's mate, while among the crew were one Canadian, a Yorkshire miner, and two men, Sidney Hemshall and Edward Everden, of Gravesend, who before the war worked in the same paper mill. The crew of 179, as she may be called for brevity, were typical of many others.

This craft had crossed the Atlantic under her own power; but Skeels described the evening and night of July 9th-10th as the worst he had ever experienced. The ship was steaming into the teeth of the wind and sea, bumping and straining abominably and burying herself in green water with heavy spray flying overall. "There wasn't a dry spot on board," he said. "We hung on by our eyelids, and most of us miserably seasick. It was worse by far than the long swell of the Atlantic."

At 4.45 a.m. on the 10th, dawn was beginning to break, and the hills and mountains of the hostile coast ahead were beginning to take shape. Filled with troops, 179 was on her way ashore with a concourse of other craft. Soon after daylight enemy shell from a coast defence battery were falling unpleasantly close; but, moving on, she beached herself and landed her troops, still under fire. Almost immediately after hauling off she was hit amidships on the port side on the waterline, the shell making a hole about 3 feet by  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet. She started to make water, so was re-beached. The enemy battery, meanwhile, had been silenced by a destroyer, though not before 179's first lieutenant and four ratings had been slightly wounded by shell splinters. It was surprising there were no more casualties. About thirty shells had fallen within twenty yards, the ship being peppered all over 275 times. A photograph was produced in evidence.

Skeels set about making repairs. As a temporary measure, the largest shell hole was filled with duffle coats and blankets, anything they could spare, or beg, borrow or steal from others. It was not very satisfactory, so they asked another ship to cut them a steel plate, and, having borrowed an electric drill, tried to heel the ship over to get the hole out of water. As she was still aground, this was impossible. However, by

extemporizing a diving helmet for working under water out of a Service gas-mask with the air supplied by a hand foghorn like an exaggerated bellows, they managed to bolt on the plate somehow. It was while this work was in progress that they discovered the shell, unexploded, still inside the ship. In all, they were on the beach for five days completing their make-shift repairs, with air raids going on most of the time, the sky mottled with shell-bursts, and many "dog-fights" overhead. The patch held and did not admit more water than could be kept under by the pumps. Nevertheless, 179 had eventually to be sent to a dockyard for repairs.

Lieutenant-Commander M. C. E. Cazaly, R.N.V.R., of Tulse Hill, London, was a sergeant in the Thames Division of the Metropolitan Police before the war. He joined the Navy in 1940, and served in landing craft, and the invasion of Sicily found him in command of a flotilla of L.C.Ts.—Landing Craft, Tank. His "flagship" was commanded by Lieutenant Leslie Roche, R.N.V.R.

Craft of the type that Cazaly commanded carried a couple of officers and ten men, three of which latter formed the engine-room department. The little ships were not speedy, and were lively enough in bad weather—too lively for some. The accommodation was anything but palatial, the officers inhabiting a small compartment with two bunks immediately opposite the small galley. Cazaly, being an extra officer on board, kept a regular watch and took turn and turn about in the captain's bunk. They carried no regular cook. "We just ask one of the crew to volunteer," he said. "If he takes any interest all goes well. If he doesn't, well . . . we always carry corned beef, biscuits and sardines, and with that and tea and cocoa to drink, with an occasional tot of rum, we can't go far wrong. We've learnt to scrounge as we go along. Cruisers and destroyers give us the run of their canteens when we meet them."

Being in the Mediterranean, he explained, was like a yachting cruise after some of the weather at home. The life, moreover, had its advantages. It was piratical, and uniform

hardly mattered. During the summer they just wore gym shoes and khaki shorts. Most of the craft of his flotilla were under fire during the landings; but the worst things were the air raids, which came out of the blue. The bombs were "a bit of a nuisance." The noise, the great spray fountains, and the showers of splinters were rather disintegrating. One felt very naked and vulnerable.

But Cazaly's most interesting experience was when one of his propeller shafts fractured at sea, and the broken portion, with the propeller, dived straight to the bottom. They managed to limp into Syracuse on the other propeller just after that port had been occupied. No repair facilities were available, so the job had to be done by the ship's own resources. Running her bows on to a convenient beach, all hands stripped and went over the side. Working in  $4\frac{1}{2}$  feet of water, occasionally under water, officers and men proceeded to uncouple the inboard end of the broken shaft, and to withdraw it. Precisely how it was done one cannot say, but there was difficulty in fitting various temporary plugs to prevent the ship being flooded. They replaced the broken shaft with the spare one carried on board, "borrowed" a propeller from a sister ship, got their ship running again, and carried on with their work. "Battling mother naked on a Sicilian beach unshipping a fractured propeller shaft from a broken-down L.C.T. is a strange sort of job for a London water policeman," Cazaly said. One could agree.

## IV

The American landings along the south coast of Sicily on that morning of July 10th were carried out with great difficulty, and at times in the face of strong enemy resistance. The wild weather had raised a heavy cross-swell and breaking surf on the beaches, which made it hazardous for the landing craft, and particularly so for those amphibian vehicles, the D.U.K.Ws., commonly called "Ducks," which were being used for the first time, but are now sufficiently familiar. Fitted with propellers, these hybrids between a boat and a truck could go

alongside ships for stores or men and take them ashore. The moment the wheels touched the beach the simple movement of a lever disconnected the propeller and converted the D.U.K.Ws. into land vehicles. It was uncanny to watch them in operation.

The Southern landings were also strongly supported by naval gunfire from the sea. Various of the exits from the beaches were found to be mined, and at Gela the enemy was strongly dug in. Before the Americans were fully deployed, a fierce counter-attack by infantry supported by many tanks broke through to the beaches. Moving in, however, cruisers and destroyers engaged hostile formations and tank columns with great success, and gave invaluable help to the hard-pressed infantry, who finally had to beat off another six attacks before the enemy retreated. Though thanks to the Allied air superiority enemy air interference was comparatively slight in the American sector, dive-bombers were a nuisance and caused some casualties.

One outstanding feature of the highly successful operation of landing the armies was the work of the landing ships and landing craft. On all the beaches, British and American, their task was efficiently and determinedly carried out. The fact that most of the commanding officers, officers and men were new to the work made their performance all the more noteworthy. Very great calls were made on their skill and good seamanship, and in making the decision to continue the operation in the face of the adverse weather, Sir Andrew Cunningham was aware of the difficulties that would have to be faced and overcome. His confidence was fully justified.

On July 10th, with his Union flag in H.M.S. *Abdiel*, the Commander-in-Chief visited the naval forces working off the beaches. To the United States flagship he signalled: "I fear you are having the worst of the weather. . . . Wish the General the best of luck. I think you have competed with the weather and all difficulties splendidly."

The hardest task undoubtedly fell to the American landing craft, some of them very small, on the beaches at Scoglitti,

Gela and Licata, and the standard of seamanship and resolution displayed in the bad weather was of a high order. In this respect, a bulletin from the Captain of the United States flagship to his officers and men issued on July 13th, is of interest:

"Admiral Hewitt, commanding the Western Naval Forces in the operation just completed, has directed me to give you a 'Well done,' and to congratulate you on your exemplary performance of duty under the arduous and trying conditions of action against the enemy, in taking the war to his own soil. He remarked especially on the quiet and efficient way the boats went out, and the fine discipline of the ships during the many attacks and alarms. To this the Commanding Officer wishes to add that the boats' crews did a fine job. The sea surf on the beaches during the period we were unloading made it inevitable that a considerable number of boats would be stranded. The cheerfulness and endurance of the crews under exhausting conditions of continuous operation over more than forty-eight hours is indicative of high morale. You pushed our part of the operation with 'relentless vigor'—'your damnedest' is a more adequate description. It is not possible to single out each and every man or gang in the ship who did their job and more than their job. The engines were always ready, the gun crews alert, the bridge gang on the job, the boat-repair gang kept them running, the hatch crews cleared their holds, the galley had plenty of chow when and where needed. In short, from stern to stern and from keel to truck, the ship's company worked as a smooth team. Even the Captain's orderly did his stint extremely well over these trying hours. It is impossible for your Commanding Officer to express his pride in you. Every man lived up to those high traditions of the Naval Service which have always carried us to victory. *Well done.*"

Enemy bombers were active after dark, and on the night of July 10th the hospital ship *Talamba*, lying three miles to seaward of one of the British anchorages and fully illuminated in accordance with the Geneva Convention, was wantonly bombed and sunk with considerable loss of life.

July 11th saw the two navies still engaged in their primary

task of landing troops, vehicles and supplies on the beaches. The weather had improved slightly, though surf still had a hampering effect at some of the landing places.

On the night of the 10th-11th, enemy positions near Pozzallo, on the south coast to the west of the Canadian landings, had been bombarded by British destroyers. The same targets were again shelled by Rear-Admiral Harcourt's flagship, the cruiser *Newfoundland* (Captain W. R. Slayter), and the destroyers *Brissenden* and *Blankney* on the afternoon of the 11th. White flags had been seen ashore, and the surrender of the small town of Pozzallo was finally accepted by a landing party from the *Brissenden*. The German garrison had fled twenty-four hours before, carrying all the portable food with them, and leaving six Italian officers and fourteen men to be made prisoners. Considerably to the embarrassment of the young officer in charge of the small naval detachment, he was handed the key of the town and a large bouquet of flowers by the senior remaining official, who happened to be the post-master. The inhabitants, we were told, evinced the greatest friendliness, with the children already making demands for chocolate and cigarettes. The proceedings had rather the atmosphere of a beanfeast.

Enemy air activity on the 11th was on a slightly increased scale, while there were signs of the presence of U-boats. The situation, however, was well in hand. The Navy was hard at it, a cruiser and monitor bombarding enemy positions near Modica in support of the Canadians, while batteries to the southward of Augusta also received attention from the sea in support of the Eighth Army. The Germans were pulling out to make a stand near Catania to protect the airfields at Gerbini, and the whole of the Cape Passero peninsula was in Allied hands, the British having captured Noto and Avola, and the Canadians advancing through the hills towards Ragusa and Comiso.

The port of Syracuse was occupied by the Royal Navy on the morning of the 11th, Rear-Admiral Troubridge entering the harbour in a minesweeper and hoisting the White Ensign.



The installations there had been very little damaged by sabotage, so thereafter Syracuse could be used for landing personnel.

On the night of the 11th-12th, the battleships *King George V* and *Howe* bombarded Marsala and Marittimo by way of a diversion to draw off German troops to the westward and away from the intended American thrust through the centre of Sicily to Palermo. American warships were still shelling enemy positions and the airfields in the south, while early in the afternoon of the 12th batteries and hostile formations near Augusta were again heavily bombarded by a force of British cruisers and a monitor. Minesweepers swept the approach channels to the port, which was entered by a British and a Greek destroyer at 4 p.m. These ships, with the cruisers and monitor outside, were mainly responsible for the fall of Augusta, which had originally been by-passed by the Army. The naval bombardment in this area was described by the Army as "accurate and timely."

There would be further stiff fighting before Sicily was conquered, but the success of the expedition was assured, and it was now that General Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander, issued a message to the Allied Navies:

"In the Sicilian operation the United States and Royal Navies have again proved that, even while engaged in operations covering the seven seas, they can plan and successfully execute vast and intricate movements in support of land operations, and can do this despite obstacles of distance, weather and enemy opposition. In this theatre the skill of the Allied Naval Commanders and staffs, under the leadership of Admiral of the Fleet Cunningham and his principal lieutenants—the American Vice-Admiral Hewitt and the British Admiral Bertram Ramsay—are reflected in the precise timing and perfect technique displayed on the beaches of Sicily, where there were landed hundreds of ships and boats whose ports of origin were scattered over half a world. Their comrades of the air and ground forces unite in an enthusiastic 'Well done.' "

A few days later, Sir Andrew Cunningham sent a message

of appreciation to the landing ships and craft, and their repair base staffs, for the great part they had played in the operation. The large number of starters and their arrival at the beaches in spite of the difficult weather, he said, was largely responsible for the element of surprise which gave the Army such a good start. In wishing them good luck, the Commander-in-Chief observed that there was plenty of work ahead which would not be easy, and ended by stressing the importance of maintenance and training.

The naval task of landing reinforcements and supplies continued without intermission. A few of the better and more sheltered beaches remained in operation until August, others, susceptible to the weather, being gradually closed down. More and more use was made of Augusta and Syracuse in the east, and Gela, Licata and Empedocle in the south. Empedocle was the port of Agrigento, to the west of Licata, and was occupied by the Americans on July 18th. There had been a complete collapse of the Italians in the south, and the Germans were pulling out. It had become obvious to their commander, General Hube, that he could no longer save the island. The Italians had lost all heart in the fighting and were deserting in shoals or surrendering. The best the Germans could do was to hold the north-eastern corner of Sicily with their main defence concentrated round Mount Etna, while outside this line everything was to be contested as long as possible for the purpose of inflicting the maximum amount of damage on the Allies. This delaying action would also allow at least a proportion of the German army to be evacuated to the mainland across the Straits of Messina.

The Royal Navy continued to give powerful fire support on the right flank of the Eighth Army fighting its way north towards the Catania plain, while on many occasions Catania and the neighbouring airfields were heavily shelled from the sea. One of these bombardments was carried out by the 15-inch guns of the veteran battleship *Warspite*, which had played a conspicuous part in the Battle of Jutland twenty-seven years before, and had been Sir Andrew Cunningham's flagship in

the Eastern Mediterranean in 1940-1. Thanks to the efforts of her engineering department, the old ship developed a turn of speed which, for her considerable age, was remarkable. The incident evoked a characteristic signal from the Commander-in-Chief: "Operation well carried out. There is no question that when the old lady lifts her skirts she can run."

The covering force of heavy ships under the command of Vice-Admiral Sir Algernon Willis cruised to the eastward of Sicily in case the Italian Fleet came out to give battle or to interfere with the landings. These ships, which from time to time included the battleships *Nelson*, *Rodney*, *Warspite* and *Valiant*, the aircraft-carriers *Formidable* and *Illustrious*, with certain cruisers and destroyers, were continually at sea in trying conditions, but as a whole did not have the good fortune to be in action.

Cruisers, destroyers and light coastal craft, however, were constantly employed on offensive sweeps and coastal bombardments. Upwards of forty British M.T.Bs. and a dozen M.G.Bs. were employed during the campaign, and some details of their work will be mentioned later.

On July 16th General Alexander, commanding the Fifteenth Army Group, wrote a letter to Sir Andrew Cunningham which was ordered to be brought to the notice of all officers and men on the Mediterranean Station:

"Before leaving Malta for the mainland, I should like to take this opportunity of expressing, on behalf of the Fifteenth Army Group, our admiration for and gratitude to the Royal Navy and the other naval units you command for the magnificent support and service you have given and continue to give to the troops under my command. It will gratify you to hear what I hear on all sides—namely, unstinted praise for the Senior Service."

The Commander-in-Chief replied:

"Thank you for your letter, which I know will give great pleasure to all officers and men under my command. A combined operation is always a matter of particular concern to naval forces, since we feel that added to the ordinary hazards

of war is the heavy responsibility of ensuring the safe and timely arrival of our troops under conditions in which they must rely on us for their defence instead of on their own right arm.

"That it has been possible to place the American and British forces under your command safely ashore with, on the whole, only the discomforts of sea passage in rough weather, is a very complete compensation for anything that the United States and Royal Navies may have done.

"We look now to your continued success, and send you and your forces our heartfelt good wishes in your task."

Three days later, July 19th, virtually saw the end of the assault upon Sicily so far as the landing of the Seventh and Eighth Armies was concerned. It was on this date that the respective appointments of Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay and Vice-Admiral H. Kent Jewitt lapsed as the Naval Commanders of the Eastern and Western Task Forces.

The work of the Allied Navies, however, was still to continue with vigour.

# v

Based originally on Malta, a distance of about 150 miles from their normal patrol areas, the M.T.Bs. at first worked off the landing beaches by day, and off the east coast of Sicily by night, searching for enemy warships and supply vessels, and creating diversions close inshore. In the early hours of July 10th, while the landings were in progress further south, M.T.Bs. 75 and 82 made one such diversion along the beach south of Catania, while another group attacked coastwise road transport and set at least one truck on fire. The 20th M.G.B. Flotilla at the same time covered the approaches to Syracuse and Augusta. All the boats had come from Malta during the bad weather.

Their duties and excitements varied. We read on July 10th of M.T.Bs. being attacked by four Focke-Wulf 190's and probably shooting one down, and of the 20th M.G.B. Flotilla being spasmodically attacked by JU. 87's and 88's throughout the day, and four members of No. 657's crew being

wounded by bomb splinters. On the evening of the 11th M.T.Bs. destroyed an Italian auxiliary minesweeper off Catania, while at much the same time M.T.Bs. 640, 651 and 670, which had sailed from Malta at 1 p.m., attacked a south-bound submarine with torpedoes, guns and depth-charges. Before diving, the U-boat retaliated with small-calibre gunfire, causing six casualties. Attacked with depth-charges, the enemy may have been damaged. Throughout daylight on the 11th, M.G.Bs. of the 20th Flotilla, working off the beaches, were attacked from dawn to dusk by enemy aircraft, of which two were shot down. The same thing occurred on the 12th, two aircraft being shot down and a third damaged. No. 662 returned to harbour at midnight, having been dive-bombed ten times.

Another encounter with submarines took place on the night of the 12th. M.T.B. 81 (Lieutenant L. V. Strong, R.N.V.R.), 77 (Lieutenant J. B. Sturgeon, R.N.V.R.), and 84 (Sub-Lieutenant G. R. Smith, R.N.V.R.), with the senior officer of the flotilla, Lieutenant C. W. S. Dreyer, R.N., on board 81, were patrolling to the southward of Messina. It was a dark night with not very good visibility near the land when, at 10.15 p.m., two south-bound submarines were sighted at ranges of 200 and 500 yards. The M.T.Bs. were alert and ready for action. They attacked at once. Hit by a torpedo from No. 81, one submarine blew up with a deafening roar and an upheaval of smoke and spray, the M.T.B. disengaging amidst showers of falling debris. The other U-boat dived, but, attacked with depth-charges, was possibly damaged. The noise of this engagement attracted two E-boats to the spot. Dreyer's party sighted them an hour later, and promptly chased. The enemy seemed to have the speed of our boats, but, falling into the arms of M.T.Bs. 655, 656 and 633, patrolling in a neighbouring area, the E-boats were attacked by gunfire, set ablaze and driven ashore. On their way back from patrol, both these divisions met seven E-boats. There was a brief but spirited engagement in which three of the enemy were damaged.

The period of the invasion of Sicily was a particularly bad time for the enemy's submarines. Apart from that destroyed by M.T.B. 81 on July 12th, that morning had seen the sinking of U-409 by H.M.S. *Inconstant* near Algiers after a single-handed hunt lasting more than three hours. Off Syracuse, on this same day, the Italian *Bronzo* was brought to the surface by the minesweepers *Seaham*, *Boston* and *Poole*, and was finally towed in triumph to Malta with the White Ensign fluttering over the green, white and red of Italy. On July 13th, the Italian *Nereide* was sunk off the toe of Italy by the destroyers *Echo* and *Ilex*, while the 15th saw the *Remo* destroyed off the Gulf of Taranto by the British submarine *United*. Eight days later the destroyers *Laforey* and *Eclipse* had a similar success with the Italian *Asciangi* off the east coast of Sicily. The Italian *Argento* was successfully disposed of by U.S.S. *Buck* on August 3rd near Pantellaria, near which island the British destroyer *Easton* and the Greek *Pindos* were to sink U-458 on August 22nd.

To revert, however, to July, and the activities of the light coastal forces off the east coast of Sicily. Their base was transferred from Malta to Syracuse, and finally to Augusta, which greatly facilitated their work in the Straits of Messina. On July 13th the 20th M.G.B. Flotilla spent a busy day at Augusta, towing lighters around the harbour and ferrying personnel and gear ashore—"rather like putting a racehorse to tow a Noah's Ark," as one of their officers expressed it. Greatly to their annoyance, too, they were assiduously attacked from the air while doing the job, though two Focke-Wulf 190's were destroyed.

On the night of July 14th, M.G.Bs. 646, 643 and 641 had another brush with an enemy submarine, which was engaged by gunfire before she submerged. Coming under the fire of enemy shore batteries, 641 was hit by a shell and sunk, though luckily without casualties.

There is a certain amount of sameness about many of these attacks by light coastal craft; but so much gallantry was displayed, so much dash and good seamanship, that it is difficult

to avoid describing their work in some detail. The fragile, unarmoured, high-speed craft varied in size, speed and armament. But in one respect they were all the same, being officered almost entirely from the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve by men who might hardly have seen the sea before the war began, and manned by men in the late 'teens and early twenties who had joined the Navy for the war from every sort of civil occupation. They had some of the toughest fighting of the war at sea, and here is an example.

The night of July 15th-16th saw M.T.Bs. 77, 82, 62 and 57 of the 7th Flotilla patrolling south-west of Reggio, on the eastern shore of the Straits of Messina. They were under the command of Lieutenant A. C. B. Blomfield, R.N., on board 77, which was temporarily commanded by Sub-Lieutenant E. H. G. Lassen, R.N.Z.N.V.R., her proper captain, Lieutenant J. B. Sturgeon, R.N.V.R., being ill on board.

At about 10.40 p.m., in the dim light of the moon, unidentified black shapes were seen steering south close to the Italian coastline. The British flotilla formed into line abreast and closed at full speed, the shapes presently resolving themselves into six E-boats travelling at about twenty knots. At 10.55 the enemy turned north, still hugging the shore. Our craft, swinging into line ahead, followed in chase. For a few agonizing minutes the E-boats were completely lost to sight under the dark shadow of the land. Then, by a lucky fluke, they were suddenly sighted again on the starboard bow silhouetted by aircraft flares over Reggio. Because of their high speed, our boats had become very strung out, 77 leading by a considerable distance. The enemy, however, was in range, and, immediately after re-sighting, 77 fired torpedoes, and at 11.2 opened fire on the last boat in the enemy line. The fire was immediately returned by all the E-boats and by two batteries on the Sicilian coast, the Straits of Messina near Reggio being little more than four miles wide. Soon afterwards the leading E-boat, hit by one of 77's torpedoes, blew up with a shattering explosion. Blomfield himself admitted he was "considerably surprised" at the result of







Dive-bombers attacking ships and landing craft unloading troops and stores south of Syracuse, Sicily.

#### BRITISH DESTROYER COVERING COMMANDO LANDING AT AUGUSTA

A Hunt class destroyer engaging shore batteries and machine-gun posts inside the harbour while Commando troops make for the shore in their landing craft. Note Mount Etna in the background.

what was really a lucky shot, the range being longer than usual.

For another quarter of an hour the gun duel was continued at high speed, with the M.T.Bs. travelling all out to close the range. The fourth boat in the enemy line, hotly engaged by 77, 82 and 62, suddenly burst into flame, while the second was seen to stop. Then, at about 11.20 p.m., six shore batteries, four in Sicily and two in Italy, engaged our craft, 77 being hit repeatedly by shell splinters and small-calibre fire. Forced to disengage, Blomfield took his boats to the southward under cover of smoke.

From now until 2.15 next morning the unit was intermittently, though accurately, shelled by shore batteries, splinters severely wounding the commanding officer of 82, Lieutenant C. A. Rees, R.N.V.R., and fatally wounding one seaman. At 5.15 a.m., when the flotilla was on its way back to Augusta, gun flashes and streams of tracer were seen to the northward. Five E-boats were in hot action with the 32nd M.T.B. Flotilla—Nos. 634, 670, 640 and 651. Blomfield swung his flotilla round and increased to full speed, opening fire on the enemy at 1,000 yards, which rapidly closed to 500, with the E-boats making smoke as they strove to escape. One of them was in obvious trouble, but on closing to complete the 'kill' one of 77's guns jammed and she was forced to haul off. However, 62 and 57 continued the engagement at short range, damaging the last boat in the enemy line at the cost of two casualties in 57, one of which, Able Seaman J. A. George, was unfortunately fatal. The action was continued on a northerly course until 6 a.m., when the British flotilla again came under heavy fire from a battery on the Italian mainland, and was forced to withdraw.

All our boats were damaged, 82 being perforated by shell splinters in the hull and upper works, with damage under water, while 77 was holed above and below the water line. As Blomfield wrote in his report, M.T.B. 77 was leaking badly, and as the only auxiliary engine available had been damaged by a cannon shell, she had to be baled out by hand until

arrival in harbour. In this spirited night's work M.T.Bs. 77, 82 and 62 fired between them nearly 1,800 rounds from their Breda guns and 4,650 from their .5-inch machine-guns.

Another exciting encounter took place the next night—July 16th–17th—when M.T.Bs. 315 (Lieutenant L. E. Newall, R.N.Z.V.R.), 260 (Lieutenant H. F. Wadds, R.A.N.V.R.), 313 (Lieutenant A. D. Foster, R.N.V.R.), and 316 (Lieutenant R. B. Adams, R.N.V.R.), with Lieutenant Denis Jermain, R.N., on board 315 in command of the flotilla, were also patrolling in the Straits of Messina. The weather was flat calm with a full moon, when, at 2.15 a.m., in a position two miles south of the town of Messina, a ship travelling at high speed was seen coming through the straits from the north. The channel thereabouts is less than two miles wide. There was little room for manœuvring, and the enemy, which proved to be an Italian cruiser, must have seen the M.T.Bs. as soon as she rounded a point of land. "He at once altered course straight for us," Jermain said. "It was clear we should have to disperse to avoid being run down."

There was no time for signalling, but all the commanding officers knew what to do. No. 316 followed 315 to the eastward, and 260 and 313 remained where they were, thus putting a couple of boats on each bow of the enemy. The cruiser swung round towards the eastern group until forced to alter course to the southward to avoid running ashore. At the same time she opened fire on all four boats at very close range, hitting 316, which blew up with the loss of all her crew. No. 315 turned and fired her torpedoes, which unfortunately missed.

Meanwhile, on the enemy's starboard bow, 260 and 313 manœuvred into position and fired torpedoes, one of which, from 260, hit the cruiser abreast the after turret. The explosion was seen by many people, including Jermain himself. No. 313 was not so lucky. Her torpedoes missed, though her commanding officer, Foster, who had been seriously wounded in the leg during the approach, showed great bravery and resolution in his attack.

Immediately on being hit, the cruiser stopped by going

## OPERATION "HUSKY." SICILY

astern with her engines, and turned first to port and then to starboard. Her damage, however, could not have been very serious, for presently she gathered way again and continued down the straits at high speed. There was danger in an Italian cruiser being at large in an area filled with Allied shipping, so, reporting her movements, Jermain shadowed the enemy well to the southward until she turned east, and it became clear she was heading for Taranto. Though this extremely well-conducted attack was not entirely successful, it was carried out with great dash and gallantry.

On the night of July 17th, M.T.Bs. had another encounter with E-boats, one of which was possibly sunk and two others damaged. On the night of the 18th-19th, another flotilla was heavily shelled by shore batteries after penetrating the Straits of Messina for the first time, M.T.B. 75 being seriously damaged by a direct hit. On the same night M.G.Bs. 643, 645 and 647 were in action with three E-boats and damaged two of them, while on the night of the 19th-20th M.T.Bs. attacked a submarine with depth-charges north of Reggio, and another party had an indecisive engagement with four E-boats.

In an official letter sent to the Senior Officer, Light Coastal Forces, by the Commander-in-Chief, the M.T.Bs., M.G.Bs. and motor launches were congratulated on their fine work in support of the operations against Sicily. They had certainly done well, for in a period of eleven days the enemy suffered one torpedo hit on a cruiser, one submarine sunk and two others damaged, three E-boats destroyed, one possibly destroyed, seven damaged and two slightly damaged, one auxiliary minesweeper sunk, with seven aircraft shot down and several more damaged. In spite of the almost nightly close-range fighting and the fire of coastal batteries, our losses in the same period were M.T.B. 316 and M.G.B. 641 sunk, M.T.B. 75 severely damaged, with superficial damage to a few others.

Working at first by themselves, but in August supplemented by destroyers, the light coastal craft continued to maintain their nightly patrols in the Straits of Messina until the end of

the campaign. They had various actions with enemy patrol craft, and often engaged shore targets and enemy's transport columns, on one occasion simulating the landing of a reconnaissance party, which caused the enemy to spend much unnecessary time and labour in mining the beach. Keeping a watch for enemy traffic their patrols were pushed right up to the port of Messina, where the straits are no more than four miles wide. Both coasts were studded with guns and search-lights, and towards the end of the campaign operations were made increasingly difficult by the light of a full moon. The fire from the batteries was always harassing and frequently very accurate. It seemed to be the enemy's policy to allow the boats to go to Messina unmolested, and to plaster them hotly on their return. One M.T.B. was lost in this way, and another badly damaged.

The vigilance and constancy of the patrols was such that, when the time came, no really large-scale evacuation took place from Messina by night. Instead, the defeated enemy seems to have preferred facing the hazards of air attack by day—sufficient proof of the important contribution of the Light Coastal Forces towards the final Allied victory in Sicily.

## VI

The naval task of supplying the Army through the advanced ports continued, while, with the Army, the Navy shared the responsibility of bringing the ports back into working order after bombardments from the air or sea, or partial demolition by the enemy. Harbours and their approach channels must be cleared by minesweepers. The dock areas had minutely to be examined for time-bombs and booby traps. Damage to installations had to be made good; wharves and jetties cleared of debris, and wrecks lifted or blown away. The work continued under frequent enemy bombing, and more often than not with an acute shortage of potable drinking water. It was largely a matter of successful improvisation, all efforts being concentrated on the landing and supply of the Armies. On July

30th, twenty days after the first landing, 5,478 tons of military stores were discharged at Syracuse, and 1,535 at Augusta in the twenty-four hours.

Palermo and Marsala were captured by the American Seventh Army on July 22nd, the enemy in the north withdrawing east along the coast road to Messina. The harbour area at Palermo was found badly battered and congested with sunken wrecks, while all the commercial lighters had been destroyed or removed. There were heavy air raids, but in five days the clean-up of the harbour was proceeding well and the unloading of ships had begun. By August 4th seven Liberty ships and some smaller craft were being discharged. Eight days later, when nine Liberty ships and a coaster were unloading, some 9,500 tons of cargo were put ashore in the twenty-four hours. Berths for ships and landing places for troops were improvised by bridging over sunken wrecks. The general direction and operation of the port of Palermo, the berthing of ships, the raising or destruction of wrecks, and the operation of dry dock and repair facilities, were all the work of a port party of the United States Navy. They succeeded magnificently.

With its roughly triangular shape, its mountainous centre, and roads closely skirting the shore along its north and east coasts, Sicily provided an ideal terrain for amphibious operations and the support of advancing armies by gunfire from the sea. Nevertheless, roads cut out of the sheer faces of coastwise cliffs or tunnelled in places through steep escarpments of rock could easily be demolished or rendered temporarily impassable behind them by a retreating enemy. The Germans, as has been said, were retiring along the northern coast road towards Messina, and it was here that the ability freely to move troops and their equipment by sea to new positions in advance of the demolitions, or in rear of the enemy, was of untold assistance to the American Seventh Army.

In the whole of the Sicilian campaign few incidents were more striking than the three "leap-frog" landings carried out by combined forces of the United States Navy and Army during the advance to Messina. On the night of August 7th-8th

the first operation was successful in landing troops in rear of the enemy positions near Terrenuova, five miles southwest of Cape Orlando. The landing was unopposed; but contact was later made with the enemy, who was engaged by warships of the United States Navy with telling results. Forced to withdraw to new positions, the Germans lost 1,500 prisoners. On the night of August 10th-11th, in the face of stiff enemy resistance, a second landing was carried out behind the enemy's lines near the mouth of the River Naso, five miles east of Cape Orlando. The attack was covered by heavy gunfire from the sea, which also helped to beat off powerful counter-attacks. A third such operation on the morning of August 16th put American troops ashore near Milazzo, some fifteen miles west of Messina, where the landing was made without much difficulty.

None of these operations, which had a decisive effect on the course of the campaign, would have been possible without the support of the Navy, and to this potent contribution must also be added the constant gunfire of the American cruisers and destroyers working on the Seventh Army's left flank during its advance. The results to the enemy were devastating. Later, in a message to Admiral Hewitt, U.S.N., and the other naval and military officers and forces concerned, Sir Andrew Cunningham mentioned the admiration with which he had watched the splendid and rapid advance of the Seventh Army. He said he was fully aware of the great contribution to this success by the United States Navy, and asked that his satisfaction might be expressed to all the American naval forces on what had been a model of the effective application of sea power in support of land operations.

Sea power, again, was most effectively employed during the advance of the Eighth Army along the coast road to Catania and the north in the face of determined enemy resistance. Monitors, cruisers, destroyers, gunboats and light coastal craft gave constant artillery support on the right flank, Catania itself, Acireale, Taormina and other key positions being bombarded by day and night. Particular attention was paid to

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blocking the coast road at Taormina, where it is cut out of the steep cliff overlooking the sea. It was bombarded about a dozen times in twenty days. Subsequent examination showed that one particularly heavy attack on August 4th had so completely blocked the road that it forced the enemy to construct a by-pass through the adjacent railway. This naval activity greatly impeded the supply of the Germans by road transport, and their subsequent retreat. From the time of the initial landing until the collapse of enemy resistance in Sicily, the Royal Navy subjected enemy targets to more than fifty deliberate bombardments over and above the almost continuous artillery support on the flank of the Army.

An important contribution to the final advance of the Eighth Army towards Messina from the south was the landing of a British commando at Scaletta, eight miles south of Messina, in rear of the enemy lines, on the night of August 15th-16th. These troops, with subsequent reinforcements and tanks, were landed by naval vessels under the cover of other warships. Messina itself, as is well known, was finally occupied on August 17th, and the whole of Sicily was in Allied hands.

There was never any chance of compelling the wholesale surrender of the enemy as there had been on the Cape Bon peninsula. There were lines of retreat by sea which the Allies could never wholly dominate. Evacuation of German troops to the mainland had been going on for weeks in a small way, and after the fall of their key defensive position at Randazzo it was greatly speeded up. Heavily armed Siebel ferries, E-boats, and all manner of other craft were pressed into service. Harassed though they were by aircraft and warships, it was calculated that during the final period 3,000 to 4,000 men got away every twenty-four hours to the mainland of Italy. The Straits of Messina were no more than four miles wide, while escape to the northward was not too difficult.

While the inshore squadrons and flotillas were active in support of the Seventh and Eighth Armies, American P.T. boats ranged the north coast of Sicily by night and penetrated into the Gulfs of Gioia and San Eufemia in search of enemy

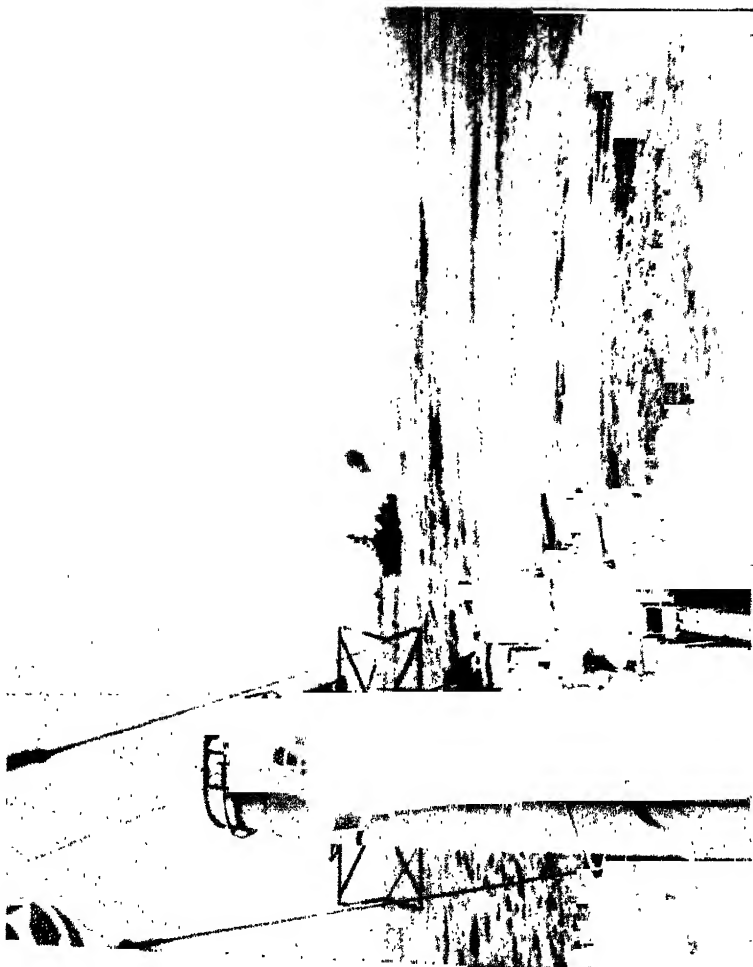


shipping. They had various clashes with enemy craft. Their British counterparts, the M.T.Bs. and M.G.Bs., as already described, penetrated nightly into the Straits of Messina and were constantly in action.

After the fall of Sicily, cruisers and destroyers of the United States Navy shelled military objectives on the Italian mainland, paying particular attention to bridges and power stations at Gioia Tauro and Palmi in the Gulf of Gioia.

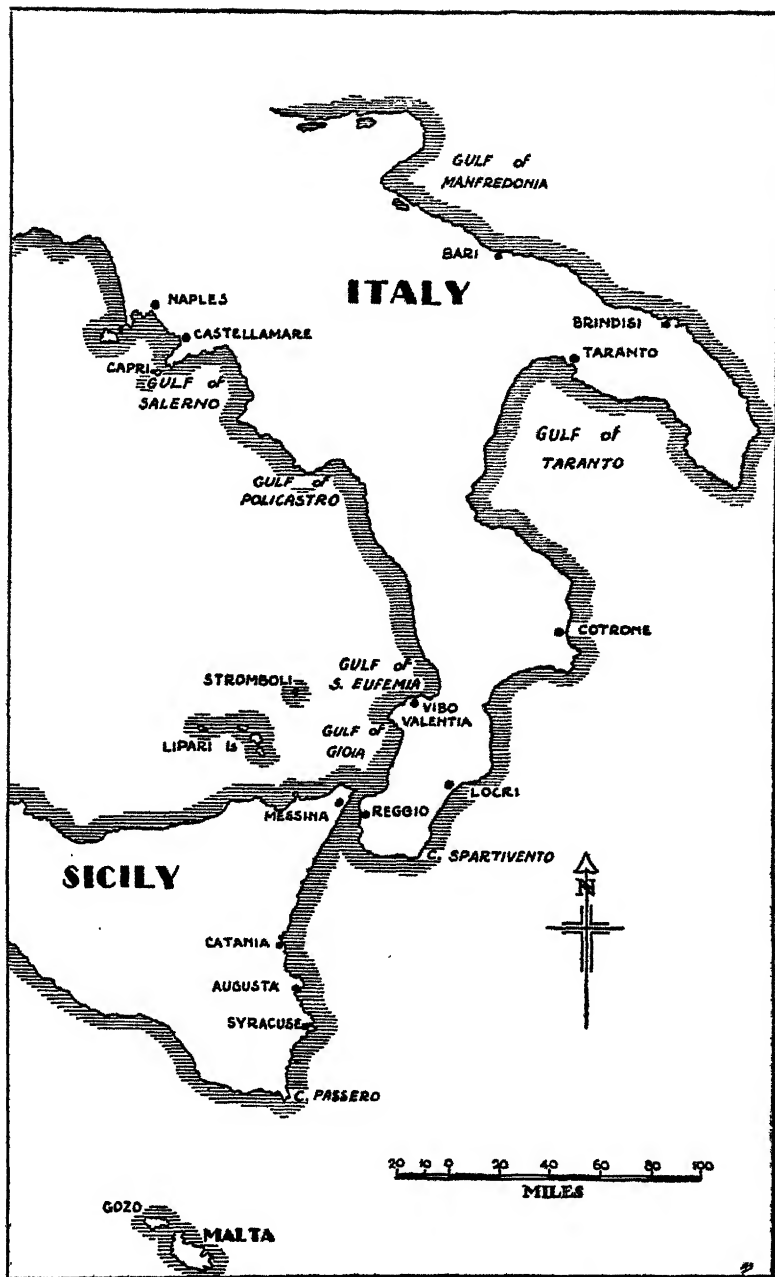
The island of Ustica, some forty miles to the northward of Palermo, had been occupied by a combined American naval and military force on August 6th, the garrison of 100 Italians being made prisoners. All Germans had left the island on July 11th. There were found in Ustica more than 200 Italian civil prisoners and a guard, while the civil population of about 1,000 were destitute and without water. There were many ill with malaria. Lipari and Stromboli, the two main islands of the Æolian group, surrendered to an American naval expedition on the morning of August 17th. The islands had been used by the Germans for military purposes, but the garrison had left a few days before.

Strong forces of British cruisers and destroyers swept both coasts of the Calabrian peninsula, and penetrated as far north as the Gulf of Naples. At one time or another the naval repair and building yard at Castellamare di Stabia, the port of Vibo Valentia Marina, important railway bridges across the River Oliva and at Cape Vaticano, together with Locri and Cotrone in the south, were all bombarded by His Majesty's ships. These more or less independent operations were not planned merely for the sake of "burning and destroying." They were purposely designed to interrupt the enemy's troop movements and communications by means of his coastal roads and railways, and to make him acutely anxious as to the wisdom of moving troops or supplies by sea. Mussolini had fallen, and in Sicily the Italians had lost the whole of their Sixth Army, numbering some 300,000 men. The Allied naval bombardments must have instilled into the minds of many more Italians that the Mediterranean was no *Mare Nostrum*.



From the bridge of an escorting U.S. destroyer, The British Cruiser *Dido* carrying out a bombardment of Italy.





ASSAULT UPON ITALY.

On August 31st, as a preliminary to our first landing in Italy three days later, enemy coastal batteries on the Italian side of the Straits of Messina were heavily bombarded by the 16-inch guns of the battleships *Nelson* and *Rodney*, and by the cruiser *Orion*. With them, on this occasion, were the destroyers *Quilliam*, *Quail*, *Queenborough*, *Troubridge*, *Tyrian*, *Offa*, *Petard*, *Tartar* and the *Piorun* of the Polish Navy. "It is reported that the targets were well covered and at least one gun knocked out," the naval communiqué announced. "Good fires, apparently caused by exploding ammunition, were observed in the target area. The enemy's return fire was ineffective."

During the Sicilian campaign British warships fired more than 20,000 rounds of ammunition from all calibres of guns from 4-inch to 16-inch at selected enemy targets in Sicily and on the Calabrian coast of Italy. Battleships sometimes took a hand in these bombardments, while the cruisers *Mauritius*, *Newfoundland*, *Orion*, *Uganda*, *Phæbe*, *Euryalus*, *Cleopatra*, *Aurora*, *Penelope*, *Sirius* and *Dido* were all in action. The fast minelayer *Abdiel* was used by the Commander-in-Chief for visiting the beaches, off which the anti-aircraft cruisers *Delhi* and *Colombo*, with their special armaments, were frequently and hotly engaged with enemy aircraft.

The monitors *Abercrombie* and *Roberts*, with their 15-inch guns, the Netherlands gunboats *Flores* and *Soemba*, and the veteran British gunboats *Aphis* and *Scarab*, all played an important part in the operation by providing supporting fire off the right flank of the Eighth Army during the advance to Catania and beyond. The *Aphis* and *Scarab* deserve more than a passing mention. Completed in 1915 for service on the rivers in Mesopotamia in the War of 1914-18, they were later sent out to China. October, 1939, found them at Shanghai. Ordered to Malta, they arrived there in April, 1940, after stopping for nearly four months at Singapore before a difficult journey across the Indian Ocean. After Italy's entry into the war in June, 1940, they had their full share of action on the right flank of the Army during the ebb and flow of the heavy fighting along the coasts of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania.

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Destroyers, as usual, were ubiquitous. They carried out varied duties: covering the heavier ships against submarine attack, protecting the convoys of merchant ships and landing craft, pin-pointing and neutralizing enemy batteries, hunting enemy submarines, patrolling off the beaches, scouring the enemy's coast to intercept his shipping, and occasionally carrying out independent bombardments of important key positions, like railway bridges and cross roads.

Among the larger "fleet destroyers" engaged in the Sicilian operations there were, in alphabetical order, the *Echo*, *Eclipse*, *Eskimo*, *Faulknor*, *Fury*, *Ilex*, *Inglefield*, *Intrepid*, *Jervis*, *Laforey*, *Lookout*, *Loyal*, *Nubian*, *Offa*, *Paladin*, *Panther*, *Pathfinder*, *Penn*, *Petard*, *Piorun* (Polish), *Quail*, *Queenborough*, *Queen Olga* (Greek), *Quilliam*, *Raider*, *Tartar*, *Troubridge*, *Tumult* and *Tyrian*. There were also present the following destroyers of the "Hunt" class: *Adrias* (Greek), *Atherstone*, *Blackmore*, *Blankney*, *Blencathra*, *Brecon*, *Brissenden*, *Brocklesby*, *Calpe*, *Cleveland*, *Eggesford*, *Farndale*, *Hambledon*, *Haydon*, *Holcombe*, *Krakowiak* (Polish), *Lamerton*, *Lauderdale*, *Ledbury*, *Liddesdale*, *Mendip*, *Oakley*, *Pindos* (Greek), *Puckeridge*, *Quantock*, *Slazak* (Polish), *Tynedale*, *Whaddon*, *Wheatland* and *Wilton*. Fleet minesweepers of the 12th, 13th and 14th flotillas present included H.M.S.'s *Acute*, *Albacore*, *Boston*, *Brixham*, *Bude*, *Cadmus*, *Circe*, *Clacton*, *Cromarty*, *Felixstowe*, *Fly*, *Mutine*, *Polruan*, *Poole*, *Rhyl*, *Rothersey*, *Seaham* and *Stornoway*.

The naval commanders in charge of the three sections of the British landings, Rear-Admirals Sir Philip Vian, R. R. McGrigor and T. H. Troubridge, flew their flags in the *Hilary*, *Largs* and *Bulolo*, respectively, while among the many other ships landing troops in the first assault were the *Queen Emma*, *Princess Beatrix*, *Royal Scotsman*, *Royal Ulsterman*, *Prince Albert* and *Ulster Monarch*. The senior naval officers in charge of the various British landings, from north to south, were Captain E. V. Lees in the *Duchess of Bedford*, Captain G. R. G. Allen in the *Reina del Pacifico*, Captain P. S. Smith in the *Winchester Castle*, Captain Lord Ashbourne in H.M.S. *Keren*, Captain N. V. Dickinson in H.M.S. *Royal Ulsterman*,

Captain A. H. Grey in H.M.S. *Glengyle*, and Captain I. R. H. Black in the *Circassia*.

This list does not pretend to be complete. It is impossible to mention all the scores of warships and merchant ships by name and the part they played. The full and detailed story of any trawler, motor launch or fleet auxiliary would almost fill a good-sized book. Moreover, as has already been pointed out, the huge majority of the smaller craft engaged bore numbers only.

Throughout the Sicilian operations His Majesty's submarines continued to carry out their important function of harassing enemy shipping wherever it was to be found, and intercepting reinforcements trying to reinforce Sicily from Italy and Albania. During the campaign British submarines sank or severely damaged more than twenty enemy transports or supply ships, besides destroying a number of naval auxiliaries.

Operations of vital importance were also carried out by the minesweepers. They were in the van of the original assaults on the various beaches, and were often under artillery fire and air attack as they swept anchorages and cleared the approaches and channels to the various ports used for supplying the Army.

Many inconsistent claims of Allied losses at sea were put out by the enemy, culminating in a German announcement on August 17th, which summarized their claim as 112 Allied merchant vessels of 516,830 tons sunk during the Sicilian operations, together with five destroyers and one escort vessel. It is the fact that during the actual operations and the period covering the transportation of men and material to Sicily from Great Britain and the United States through the submarine zone in the North Atlantic, the actual amount of Allied shipping lost through enemy action was 85,000 tons. Probably to bolster up Axis morale after the *débâcle* in Sicily, the German estimate was thus exaggerated by 600 per cent.!

The British naval losses during the Sicilian campaign were three submarines, three motor-torpedo-boats and one motor gunboat.

## VII

It is true that the British and American Navies had not seen the hard fighting they expected. Except on some of the southern beaches, where the opposition was German, there was no stubborn resistance to the landings. The Italians may have been taken by surprise, but, except for a few isolated units, their fighting during the Sicilian campaign was something less than half-hearted, in spite of the fact that there were some 300,000 Italian troops in the island. Of these about 200,000 finally became prisoners, and among the remainder were many who threw away their weapons, changed into civilian clothes and disappeared amongst the Sicilian population. All of the hard fighting was done by the Germans, and their resistance was obstinate indeed.

There were many reasons for the Italian collapse. The nation was war weary, and Mussolini's much-vaunted Italian Empire had already disappeared, with scores of thousands of the best Italian troops. Before their reinforcement by the Germans, the Italian Army in Libya had been badly mauled by inferior numbers of troops from Britain, India and the Dominions. Much the same thing had happened in Greece until the Italians were rescued by the Germans. After their reinforcement in Libya by Rommel's Afrika Korps, the combined armies had advanced to within a few days' march of Alexandria and the Suez Canal. They had thought themselves certain of getting there. Why else should they have struck a special official medal in bronze commemorating their triumph? It has a ribbon combining the green, white and red of Italy, with the red, white and black of Germany. The obverse shows two knights in armour, Italy and Germany, standing on the forelegs of a crocodile, the British Empire or the Suez Canal, wrenching its jaws open. The reverse has inscriptions in Italian and German commemorating the African campaign, together with representations of Mussolini's "marble arch" at Tripoli, the Italian fasces and German swastika, and a reef knot typifying the alliance.



The design was premature. With victory almost in sight, Rommel had been forced to halt through lack of transport, fuel and supplies. Then came the Eighth Army's smashing and decisive victory at El Alamein, which sent the remnants of the Afrika Korps reeling back across the desert to Tunisia with Montgomery's veterans in pursuit. Scorned and treated with ridicule by the Germans, the Italians were virtually abandoned and their transport seized. Then had come that final surrender in the Cape Bon peninsula, where the Italians lost another 350,000 prisoners. Mussolini had fallen on July 25th, 1943. His "eight million flashing bayonets" had vanished—frittered away. His expensive Navy and Air Force had been powerless to affect the issue. The gimcrack structure of the Fascist régime had crumbled in ruin.

The final issue in the battles of Sicily depended upon the infantry, the tanks and the aircraft. They had the greatest share in actual combat. But without the necessary sea power to land, support and supply them, both Army and Air Force were powerless. At the time it happened, the assault upon Sicily was the greatest conjoint operation that had ever taken place. Many lessons were learned and some mistakes were made; but victory was only forthcoming by the efforts and close co-operation and understanding of the Navies, Armies and Air Forces of the British Empire and the United States working together in unison.

In his preliminary message, Sir Andrew Cunningham had reminded the seamen that they were "about to embark on the most momentous enterprise of the war," that their object was clear, and that it was their "primary duty to place this vast expedition ashore in the minimum time and subsequently to maintain our military and air forces as they drive relentlessly forward into enemy territory." All this they did, in full measure.

As this brief account has shown, sea power works in many different ways. Fighting means much; but not all. If the ships and small craft that had the good fortune to be in action be likened to the sharp point of a sword, that host of vessels

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which gave arduous and devoted service over the rim of the visible horizon represented the strength behind its thrust. And Sicily showed, as did the Battle of the Atlantic, the convoys to Malta and North Russia, and every other maritime operation in which the two sea services were engaged, that in war the navies and merchant navies were interdependent and indivisible. The merchant seamen were not mere transporters of men and material, but fighting seamen giving the same service as, and enduring greater risks and hardships than, those in many of the warships.

Ships of every description served in that campaign in the Mediterranean during the hot summer of 1943. All their seamen played their incalculable, though sometimes unobtrusive, part in the first Allied landing in strength in enemy territory, and the opening of the so-called "Second Front" against the Axis.

In the months that lay ahead even greater efforts were to be called for.

## CHAPTER VI

## FIRST LANDINGS IN ITALY

## I

SICILY was only a stepping stone. On the morning of September 2nd the battleships *Warspite* and *Valiant* bombarded enemy positions on the toe of Italy south of Reggio. At dawn next day all the available British artillery massed in the hills around Messina opened up a furious fire on Reggio and other targets on the opposite side of the Straits. The Navy co-operated with the cruisers *Mauritius* and *Orion*, the monitors *Erebus*, *Roberts* and *Abercrombie*, the destroyers *Quilliam*, *Quail*, *Queenborough*, *Offa*, *Loyal* and the Polish *Piorun*, and gunboats *Aphis* and *Scarab*, all bombarding. There was no retaliation. The Italians were not fighting, and the Germans had started their retirement to the north.

Meanwhile, British and Canadian troops embarked at Messina for passage across the Straits in a swarm of landing and other craft of the Royal Navy. They met with no opposition during the four-mile trip, and touched down on the beaches between Reggio and Catona a few miles north. The first loads were cleared well ahead of time, and by the early afternoon the second flights were moving in with reinforcements and supplies.

Sir Andrew Cunningham was afloat in the destroyer *Tartar* to witness the operation, which continued for several days under the direction of Rear-Admiral R. R. McGrigor.

The "Messina Straits Regatta," as it came to be called, was a triumphal success. General Montgomery badly needed vehicles and fuel to continue his advance to the north, and the Navy had promised the Eighth Army that it would ferry 5,000 vehicles in five days. Put on their mettle, the crews of the landing craft worked as never before, many exceeding the

agreed number of seven trips a day, and some doing as many as ten and twelve.

Admiral McGrigor presented a flag to the craft which did the greatest number of trips each day. It was a white flag with a red rooster, proudly displayed by the winner during his passages across the Straits. As the commanding officer of one of the craft wrote: "The competition to fly this flag was simply terrific. Stokers nursed their engines to make certain of getting that little extra spurt when it was wanted. Crews who were slow in getting their ramp doors up or down were cursed by their coxswains, while coxswains who deviated from their course were equally cursed by their crews. Discomforts, food and sleep were all equally forgotten. One coxswain and his crew, who had been without sleep for forty-eight hours, was heard bitterly complaining to the Army because his loading was held up for fifteen minutes."

The consequence of this fierce energy was that the Army's request was more than furnished. Instead of 5,000 vehicles in five days, no fewer than 5,300 were ferried across the Straits of Messina in *three* days.

Admiral McGrigor signalled to all concerned that he had watched with admiration the continual stream of landing craft, and that the way in which they had been handled, their rapid turn-round, and the courage and determination of their crews had been in accordance with the highest traditions of the Royal Navy. "I should like," he concluded, "to congratulate all officers, coxswains and crews on their magnificent work."

General Montgomery, too, said in a message: "I must say how very grateful I am for the great effort made by the Royal Navy in maintaining such a high volume of traffic over this ferry. It was one of the major features which enabled us to advance so rapidly, and resulted in the linking up of the Fifth and Eighth Armies."

On Sunday, September 5th, the destroyer *Quilliam*, after passing through the Straits of Messina, was providing the necessary artillery support on the left flank of the Army in the Bagnara area, south-west of Palmi, in the Gulf of Gioia, where

troops had also been landed. The next day, for the first time since Italy's entry into the war in June, 1940, the Straits of Messina were open to Allied navigation.

On September 3rd, though it was not to be generally known for another five days, an armistice had been signed between Italy and the United Nations. Italy's surrender was complete and unconditional, the terms including the transfer of the Italian fleet to Allied control, the cessation of hostilities, the handing over of Allied prisoners of war, and the denial of all facilities to the Germans. This last provision, however, could not be applied. Mussolini had fallen on July 25th, and from that moment the Germans had been rushing reinforcements into northern Italy to hold the great industrial centres, the northern ports, and as much of the peninsula as possible.

## II

General Montgomery's Eighth Army began its crossing of the Straits of Messina on September 3rd, and pushed rapidly north, with the Germans in retreat. Roughly forty miles to the northward of the Straits of Messina, at the southern end of the Gulf of S. Eufemia, is the little port of Vibo Valentia Marina, which had so often been bombarded from the sea. Suitable only for coasting vessels, it is a small harbour with sandy beaches and a protecting mole about 600 yards long. The railway runs close to the foreshore. Above it, the main road is cut out of the steep hillside and overlooks the harbour and the sea. Behind the road the ground rises abruptly to heights of about 2,000 feet. The town of Vibo Valentia itself lies some distance inland among the wooded hills.

It had been decided to land a considerable body of troops behind the van of the German retreat to speed up the advance of the Eighth Army by interfering with the enemy's withdrawal and to prevent road demolition. The enemy's guns and mechanical transport could only move by road, and Vibo Valentia Marina, where it ran closest to the shore, was the place chosen.

Some hours before dawn on September 8th saw the assaulting ships and craft moving in towards the land without lights. It was a calm night and very dark, as black as ink under the ebony background of hills rising steeply from the foreshore. It was difficult for the landing ships and craft to find the precise beaches laid down in the operation orders, but, nosing carefully in, they touched down and lowered their ramps. The first waves of assaulting troops, with tanks, were successfully put ashore.

It had been hoped that the landing might only be lightly opposed. As it was, the speed of the German withdrawal had been underestimated, for the road overlooking the harbour was crowded with the van of the retreating enemy, amply provided with artillery, mortars and machine guns. Gunfire support was provided from the sea, but as the light slowly grew an increasing volume of enemy fire was directed at the beaches and their approaches. It produced a situation which soon became difficult and dangerous. The troops, landing and advancing, were pinned down and forced to dig in before reaching their objectives. Their behaviour in the most trying circumstances was all that could be desired. As one naval officer wrote: "They were mostly young troops, or so it seemed to me. Stuck in their landing craft, they were under heavy fire on the way in. They were under heavier fire ashore; but their conduct all through was simply magnificent."

The Naval Beach Party, under Lieutenant T. L. Martin, R.N., were among the first to land. At times, too, they also were forced to dig in; but until eleven o'clock that night, when the enemy finally withdrew, they most coolly and efficiently carried out their duties with the beach swept by continuous mortar and machine-gun fire. The configuration of the land made it difficult to keep down the enemy fire by bombardment from the sea.

There were many deeds of gallantry. The tank-landing and other craft, manned by their young crews, behaved with their customary skill and bravery. They incurred casualties, but, running in under heavy fire, they rapidly discharged their loads, unbeached again and got away. This short account does

not pretend to give the full story of one exciting day's work on the part of a small section of the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean, but here, in brief, is the case of one ship, His Majesty's L.S.T. (Landing Ship, Tank) 65, commanded by Lieutenant-Commander Leslie John Smith of the Royal Naval Reserve.

She carried guns and vehicles, and quite early in the operation it was necessary that she should be beached so that the Army should have the benefit of her valuable cargo. Led by a motor launch (Harbour Defence M.L. 1128) flying the flag of Rear-Admiral R. R. McGrigor, who had already been wounded, L.S.T. 65 steamed shoreward in the full light of the morning soon after 8 a.m., zigzagging as she went. The largest and most satisfactory object within easy range, she at once became the target for every enemy gun that would bear.

She was very soon hit and on fire on the upper deck, the petrol in the vehicles blazing and putting forth clouds of dense black smoke. Realizing that zigzagging was becoming ineffective, Smith steered a steady course, firing all his available guns as he went. He charged straight for the beach at full speed, grounded, and tried to open the bow doors, only to find that one of them had been damaged by shell fire and refused to open. This meant that the landing of guns and vehicles was held up. The ship was still under very heavy fire. Badly damaged, she had had many killed and wounded. But there was a bulldozer on the beach, and this redoubtable machine soon dragged the recalcitrant door open by brute strength, which permitted every vehicle on board, including those which had been burnt out, to be unloaded in just over an hour and a half. Mortar and machine-gun fire continued while the work was in progress, and L.S.T. 65 had to remain beached most of the day. She was hit more than forty times, and, as says a laconic report, "received much damage from shell fire, high explosive bursts and machine-gun fire."

A senior naval officer wrote of the "great determination and gallantry" with which Smith took his ship in and beached her. "I cannot speak too highly of the conduct of this L.S.T.,

which was praised by the Army and all who saw it," he continued. "The guns she carried were in action a few minutes after she beached, and helped to relieve a difficult situation."

Among the vessels detailed to provide the gun support at Vibo Valentia Marina was L.C.G. (Landing Craft, Gun) No. 12, commanded by Sub-Lieutenant Kenneth Owen Griffith, R.N.V.R., of Llandudno. His ship had come out from England just in time to take part in the assault upon Sicily on July 10th.

Between 5 and 6 a.m. on September 8th, L.C.G. 12 was close inshore engaging the enemy guns sweeping the harbour and its approaches. She was heavily fired upon in return, and a high explosive shell, bursting close over the bridge, killed or wounded all the officers. Though mortally and terribly wounded, the gallant Griffith told his men to lash him in a bamboo Nielsen stretcher and place him upright, so that he could con his badly damaged ship out of action. This most courageous young officer died on the bridge, still at his post of duty.

Able Seaman Thomas Henry Righard Hills, of Didcot, Berkshire, was the only man left alive on or near the bridge. On his captain's death, he took command of the ship and carried her out of action. Her damage was such that she had to be towed to Malta for repairs.

There were many examples of gallant self-sacrifice and devotion to duty on that eventful day at Vibo Valentia Marina. In spite of the enemy fire, there was no faltering on the part of the young officers and men landing the troops, no hesitancy on the part of the troops themselves. Due to the inevitable chances of war, the operation did not work out according to plan. Nevertheless, it succeeded in its object, in that the retreat of the Germans was considerably hastened and they were unable to complete their demolitions along a vital stretch of road presently to be used by the Eighth Army.

Compared with larger operations elsewhere, the landing at Vibo Valentia Marina was no more than a side-show; all the same, one of those many instances where sailors and soldiers worked side by side in conditions of great danger in perfect understanding of each other's problems and difficulties.



## CHAPTER VII

## ITALIAN SURRENDER

## I

AS has been said, the armistice with Italy had been signed on September 3rd, and it involved her unconditional surrender. The story of all the complicated negotiations between the Allied and Italian representatives has already been told elsewhere and in detail. What with hurried flights by aeroplane, disguises, the use of portable radio sets, and secret meetings in Lisbon, Sicily and Italy, often under the very noses of the Germans, the tale reads more like an exciting mystery novel than something that really happened.

Like all the other Italians, Marshal Badoglio was completely unaware that the landings in the Gulf of Salerno were timed to take place before dawn on September 9th, or, indeed, that the convoys containing troops and their equipment for the invasion of Italy were already in the Mediterranean. Fearful of German retaliation and the possible destruction of Rome, the centre of their universe and of everything for which they stood and held sacred, the Italians were desperately anxious that the momentous news of the armistice should not be made known to the world until the Allies had actually invaded the mainland. The Allied commanders, on the other hand, wished to announce the armistice at 6.30 p.m. on the evening before the landings, which would permit the news to percolate through Italy and among the Italian troops. This, it was considered, would avoid Italian opposition on the beaches at Salerno, or Italian resistance to the advance of General Montgomery's Eighth Army from the south.

The date and time of the announcement of the armistice were further complicated by the fact that it had originally been

intended simultaneously to land an American airborne division near Rome to seize the airfields, and to deal with the two German armoured divisions which had been massed there to help the Italians. This part of the plan was finally abandoned because the airfields were invested by the Germans and had already passed out of Italian control. To have dropped an entire division of specially selected and highly trained parachute troops near the capital in conditions which nobody could measure, and without the certainty of active and competent co-operation and assistance from the Italians, might have led to annihilation.

It is unnecessary here to recapitulate the full story, but in the late afternoon of September 8th General Eisenhower broadcast the news of the armistice with Italy from the Allied radio stations in North Africa. At much the same time, the B.B.C. in London and the radio networks in the United States relayed the announcement all over the world. Italy had capitulated! It was about noon in New York and evening in London. With thankfulness in their hearts, the crowds in both cities, and in many another, showed their emotion in the usual way.

It was an integral part of the plan that Badoglio should also broadcast a simultaneous proclamation to the people and armed forces of Italy. During the afternoon of the 8th, however, information had come through to General Eisenhower's headquarters that the parachute landing at Rome was impossible, and that Badoglio still wished to delay the armistice announcement until the Allies landed. The airborne landing was cancelled at the eleventh hour; but to persuade Badoglio to play his part was another matter. He definitely could not be told that the invasion was to take place before dawn the next morning, so at about 3.30 p.m. General Eisenhower sent the Marshal "an extremely strong personal message" by secret radio. Precisely what was said has not been divulged.

As arranged, the Supreme Allied Commander went on the air. He finished his broadcast; but those monitoring the Italian transmissions heard no reciprocal announcement from Rome. Time passed leaden-footed. Tension increased. Was it

possible that Badoglio was still holding out? The atmospherics were bad, and it was likely enough that General Eisenhower's personal message had never got through to Rome.

The minutes dragged on—thirty, forty-five, fifty-five. Then, an hour after the General's broadcast, the radio operators stiffened in their seats as they heard someone speaking in Italian. It was a tired and aged voice, very faint:

"The Italian Government, recognizing the impossibility of continuing the unequal struggle against the overwhelming power of the enemy, with the object of avoiding further and most grievous harm to the nation, has requested an armistice from General Eisenhower, Commander-in-Chief of the Anglo-American Allied Forces. This request has been granted. The Italian forces will, therefore, cease all acts of hostility against the Anglo-American forces wherever they may be met. They will, however, oppose attacks from any other quarter."

## II

Most of the ships at sea normally listened to the B.B.C.'s programmes and broadcast the news to their ships' companies. And at 5.20 p.m. on that calm evening of September 8th came the startling announcement that Italy was out of the war. With some men in the invasion fleet the defection of one partner in the Axis may have encouraged feelings of optimism in regard to the landings on the morrow. With the Germans caught on one foot, so to speak, they may have argued that the resistance to the landings might not be very stubborn—indeed, that the new assaults might be no more difficult than those in Sicily.

General McCreery commanded the British troops of X Corps to be landed in the northern part of the Gulf of Salerno, and Commodore G. N. Oliver was the Naval Commander. They were both on board H.M.S. *Hilary*. Realizing the possible effects of the B.B.C.'s announcement upon the assault troops, the General and Commodore agreed upon a visual signal being passed to all the ships of the Northern Force in company, which included the large L.S.Is. (Landing

Ships, Infantry) carrying the 56th Division. There was just time to pass the message before dark, and it said, in so many words, that there was to be no relaxation of the offensive, as it seemed certain that the German forces opposing the landing would resist resolutely. Soon after dark, bombing and torpedo attacks on Commodore Oliver's force dispelled all uncertainty in the matter. The news of the Italian surrender did not catch the Germans by surprise. They were swift to react, and for a time, as will be described later, the Allied success at Salerno hung in the balance.

On the evening of September 8th, the news of the Italian surrender already having been broadcast, the Commander-in-Chief officially informed the Mediterranean and Levant Commands of the Armistice. Operations in progress were to continue; but Italian armed forces and aircraft were to be treated as friendly unless they committed or threatened hostile action. Italian warships were directed to sail after dark and to proceed to Bone, Augusta or Malta, arriving during daylight. Merchant vessels were instructed to proceed to Gibraltar, Algiers, Bone or Malta. Ships were advised, if possible, to sail in groups.

The bulk of the Italian fleet was at Spezia, with another force at Taranto. Other units were at Genoa and Trieste. In anticipation of the armistice, Vice-Admiral A. J. Power (Vice-Admiral, Malta) was directed to hoist his flag in the battleship *Howe* (Captain C. H. L. Woodhouse). He was to proceed with the *King George V* (Captain T. E. Halsey), a destroyer flotilla and a minesweeping force, to rendezvous with the cruisers *Aurora* (Commodore W. G. Agnew), *Penelope* (Captain G. D. Belben), *Sirius* (Captain P. W. B. Brooking), *Dido* (Captain John Terry), U.S.S. *Boise* (Captain L. H. Thebaud, U.S.N.), and H.M.S. *Abdiel* (Captain D. Orr-Ewing), which had embarked troops and equipment of the 1st British Airborne Division and had sailed from Bizerta on the evening of the 8th. "Force Z," as it was called, was to go to Taranto, and there to occupy the port with the compliance and, it was hoped, the help of the Italians.

At 4.30 p.m. on the 8th, aircraft reconnaissance over Spezia showed that three Italian battleships and two cruisers were leaving, or about to leave, harbour. They were joined at sea during the night by other ships from Genoa, and shortly after 9.30 next morning were sighted by reconnaissance aircraft steaming down the west coast of Corsica on the course laid down in the armistice terms. The fleet consisted of the three battleships *Roma*, *Italia* and *Vittorio Veneto*, six cruisers and thirteen destroyers. On reaching the latitude of the Straits of Bonifacio, the fleet turned eastward into the Gulf of Asinara, in the north-west of Sardinia. It is said that the instructions to do so were issued by German authorities under the pretext that they came from the Italian Admiralty.

On reconsidering the matter, however, the Italian Commander-in-Chief in the *Roma* decided to carry out the strict terms of the armistice, and turned his fleet to the westward. Soon afterwards it was bombed from the air, which evoked radio protests from the Italians, as they thought the aircraft were Allied. They were not. At about 4 p.m. the fleet was attacked by fifteen JU.88's with glider bombs, and the *Roma* was hit, badly damaged and set on fire. She sank twenty minutes later with heavy loss of life, including the Commander-in-Chief. The *Italia* was also hit and damaged.

The force then split, the *Italia* and *Vittorio Veneto*, with five cruisers and seven destroyers, steaming south towards the coast of North Africa. The remaining cruiser, the *Regolo*, with six destroyers, remained with the sinking *Roma* and rescued survivors, afterwards proceeding to the Balearic Islands. Here the cruiser and four destroyers were interned, and the destroyers *Pegaso* and *Impetuoso* scuttled themselves outside Spanish territorial waters.

On September 9th, the same day that the fleet from Spezia was attacked, the Italian destroyers *Vivaldi* and *Da Noli* were steaming down the east coast of Corsica as directed. On reaching the southern end of the island, they received orders purporting to come from the Italian naval authorities ordering them to proceed through the Straits of Bonifacio. They obeyed,

and while doing so were engaged by German shore batteries and landing craft. They returned the fire and succeeded in sinking some of the landing craft, though the *Vivaldi* was badly hit and the *Da Noli* struck a mine and blew up, a few of her survivors being rescued by the Germans. The damaged *Vivaldi* tried to reach the Balearic Islands, but sank during the afternoon of September 10th. Her crew attempted to complete the journey in one of the ship's motor boats, but were intercepted by H.M. submarine *Sportsman* which took off forty-four survivors.

"Force Z," meanwhile, under the command of Vice-Admiral Power, after sighting at sea the Taranto detachment of the Italian fleet consisting of the battleships *Andrea Doria* and *Caio Duilio*, with two cruisers and a destroyer, on their way to Malta, reached Taranto during the late afternoon of September 9th. The reception was friendly, and the landing of troops and unloading of stores began at once. It was while this work was in progress that the fast minelayer H.M.S. *Abdiel* swung on to a mine in the outer harbour and sank with heavy casualties. The loss of this gallant ship and of so many of her officers and men who had given such good service in the Mediterranean was greatly to be deplored.

Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham at this time was flying his flag in H.M.S. *Largs* at Bizerta, his headquarters ship for the Salerno operation. On the afternoon of September 9th, the battleships *Warspite* (Captain H. A. Packer), flying the flag of Rear-Admiral A. W. La T. Bisset, and *Valiant* (Captain L. H. Ashmore), with the destroyers of the 8th Flotilla—*Faulknor* (Captain A. K. Scott-Moncrieff), *Fury*, *Echo*, *Intrepid*, *Raider*, the Greek *Queen Olga* and the French *Le Terrible*, were detached from the forces covering the Salerno operation. Until they met the Italians near Bone at 6 a.m. on the 10th, only a few of the most senior officers in those ships knew they had been detailed to shepherd the flower of the Italian fleet to Malta. To guard against any possible treachery at the last moment, our ships were at action stations with the turrets trained fore and aft. This did not prevent little knots of

sailors on the upper decks rubbing their eyes in amazement as they saw the long line of Italian ships, each flying the Italian ensign and a long black pendant to signify that they were working under Allied instructions, looming one by one through the low haze shrouding the horizon. One—two—five—eight big ships, and a handful of destroyers. It was all so sudden and unexpected. One can imagine the smothered remarks as they watched the spectacle spread out before them. It meant the surrender of Italy, nothing less. Those light grey ships were the fruits of three hard years of naval war in the Mediterranean. The British ships closed and turned to take station in dead silence. There was no demonstration, no cheering.

At 1.30 that afternoon Sir Andrew Cunningham hoisted his Union flag in the destroyer *Hambleton* (Lieutenant-Commander G. W. McKendrick). With him went General Eisenhower and Commodore R. M. Dick, the naval Chief of Staff. The *Hambleton* proceeded to sea to meet the Italian fleet north of Bizerta. It was a sight never to be forgotten.


Astern of the *Warspite* and *Valiant* steamed the Italian cruiser *Eugenio di Savoia*, flying the flag of Admiral Romeo Oliva, who had succeeded to the command after the death of the Italian Commander-in-Chief in the *Roma*. She was followed in turn by the *Emanuele Filiberto Duca D'Aosta*, *Luigi di Savoia Duca degli Abruzzi*, *Raimondo Montecuccoli* and *Giuseppe Garibaldi*. The two battleships *Vittorio Veneto* and *Italia* brought up the rear, with the Italian destroyers on either flank astern of the British.

The *Hambleton* circled the fleet at a distance of less than a mile. There was no ceremony and little signalling; but the occasion was almost as historic as that on November 21st, 1918, when the German High Seas Fleet was conducted into the Firth of Forth by the Grand Fleet commanded by Sir David Beatty in the *Queen Elizabeth*.


Besides taking part in the Battle of Jutland, the veteran *Warspite* had also been present at the surrender of the German Fleet on November 21st, 1918. Looking at the old ship which had flown his flag in the Eastern Mediterranean during the







The 35,000-ton Italian battleship *Vittorio Veneto* steaming to surrender.



Italian fleet makes for Alexandria: The battleship *Vittorio Veneto*, with the cruiser *Duca Aosta* and the destroyer *Velite*.

hard times of 1940-1, Sir Andrew Cunningham must have thought of the previous occasions he had seen Italian battleships from the *Warspite's* bridge with the splashes from the British 15-inch shell following the fleeing enemy to the horizon.

"Yes," he said to a journalist who was present. "This is a great day for us, and a very useful day. But I always thought it might end like this." He added that the Mediterranean had been thick with Italian ships in 1940; but that they had always been chased home. They were not so tough, and at any time during the past three years the Royal Navy would gladly have given them a run for their money.

Admiral and General were in great good humour as the *Hambleton* carried them back to Bizerta in the cool of the afternoon and the Italian fleet gradually disappeared over the clear-cut rim of the horizon to the eastward.

The Italian fleet had surrendered, and this was certainly a red-letter day in the war and the history of the Royal Navy. But about 350 miles to the north-west of Bizerta a great Allied landing in the Gulf of Salerno had been in progress for thirty-six hours. There had been fierce opposition and heavy fighting—heavier than had been expected. It was a joint naval and military and air operation, and the minds of the Supreme Commander and his naval Commander-in-Chief must have been considerably preoccupied as they returned to their headquarters to study the situation in detail.

Here, however, it is as well to ignore strict chronology and complete the story of the surrender of the Italian fleet.

### III

The battleships *Andrea Doria* and *Caio Duilio*, with the two Italian cruisers and a destroyer from Taranto, arrived at Malta on the afternoon of September 10th. The *Warspite* and *Valiant*, with the ships under their charge, reached the island at nine o'clock next morning. The Commander-in-Chief had flown to Malta to accept the surrender, and on September 11th sent his famous signal to the Admiralty: "Be pleased to inform their lordships that the Italian Battle Fleet

now lies at anchor under the guns of the fortress of Malta."

Malta, as can be imagined, was in a ferment of joyful excitement.

Admiral da Zara, who had been in charge of the Taranto detachment, was the senior Italian flag officer. Landing at the Custom House Steps at Malta, where a naval guard of honour was mounted, he was received by Commodore R. M. Dick, conducted to a car, and taken to the Commander-in-Chief's office in the Lascaris Barracks, where Sir Andrew Cunningham accepted the formal surrender and gave Admiral da Zara his instructions. They confirmed arrangements already made, and insisted upon certain measures of disarmament. Arrangements were also made to send some of the Italian battleships to the Levant, as it was obvious that so large a force could not be kept at anchor off Malta. As it was, the island had barely enough food and water for its own population.

The battleship *Giulio Cesare*, which had been refitting at Trieste after being partially sunk by aircraft of the Naval Air Arm at Taranto in 1940, and the seaplane-carrier *Giuseppe Miraglia*, a converted ex-passenger steamer, also from the Adriatic, reached Malta on September 13th after being attacked by enemy aircraft on the way. On the 14th, the *Italia* and *Vittorio Veneto*, with four cruisers and four destroyers, escorted by H.M.S. *Howe*, *King George V* and six destroyers, sailed for Alexandria, where they arrived at 8 a.m. on September 16th, being met at sea by Admiral Sir John Cunningham, Commander-in-Chief, Levant, with his flag flying in the minesweeper *Derby*.

On arrival, the armaments and radio of the Italian ships were rendered useless, similar steps being taken with the vessels remaining at Malta. It was later arranged with the Italian naval authorities to reduce the complements of the surrendered battleships and submarines, of which latter nineteen were in Allied hands by September 14th. Certain cruisers, destroyers, torpedo-boats and some smaller craft retained their full complements, as it was intended to use them for ferry services and local escort work.

On September 22nd, the Commander-in-Chief sailed from Malta in the cruiser *Euryalus* and proceeded to Taranto. The main object of his visit was to reach a working arrangement with the Italians to implement the naval terms of the armistice. The meeting was held on board the *Euryalus*, and was attended by the Italian Minister of Marine, Admiral de Courton, Admiral Brivonesi, the Italian Commander-in-Chief at Taranto, and officers of their staffs. Vice-Admiral Peters and Commodore Dick were present with Sir Andrew Cunningham.

At this meeting plans were drawn up for the handling and operation of the Italian Navy and Mercantile Marine. Except for one or two matters of principle which were referred to Marshal Badoglio by telephone and his concurrence obtained, the British proposals were agreed to with little dissent. The agreement was finally drawn up in the form of a document between the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, and the Italian Minister of Marine, since at that time there was no recognized Italian government and it was wished to keep the document on the plane of a series of agreements between the naval officers primarily concerned. Known as the "Cunningham Agreement," it was later signed by Rear-Admiral McGrigor, on behalf of the Commander-in-Chief, and Admiral de Courton, as the Italian Minister of Marine, after amendments had been made to safeguard certain points no longer included in the official terms of the armistice.

Italian vessels which finally passed into Allied control included five battleships, eight light cruisers, seven large destroyers, twenty-four escort destroyers or torpedo-boats, forty submarines, nineteen corvettes, thirty-two motor-torpedo-boats, one seaplane tender, three minesweepers, eight naval tankers and tenders, two cadet training ships, together with many miscellaneous small craft. The list also included about 100 seagoing merchant vessels of at least 170,000 gross tons. Cruisers were subsequently employed for the movement of Italian troops, and destroyers, torpedo-boats and corvettes for escort service with convoys. Full use was also made of naval auxiliaries and all Italian merchant vessels in seagoing condition.

## CHAPTER VIII

SALERNO: OPERATION "AVALANCHE":  
BATTLE FOR THE BEACHES

## I

THE ultimate aim of the assault in the Gulf of Salerno was the capture of the port of Naples for the reinforcement and supply of the Army in Italy. The beaches in the Gulf of Gaeta, north of Naples, were not so good, and were beyond the effective range of single-seater fighters operating from Sicily. The immediate object was to land sufficient forces to capture a bridgehead and the neighbouring airfields—in short, to secure a land front of about forty miles, including the road east of the Plain of Salerno running through the foothills from Paestum through Battipaglia to Salerno and Vietri sul Mare, the port of Salerno itself, and the high ground from which the port and landing places could be overlooked and dominated by artillery fire.

More than 600 vessels and craft, great and small, warships and merchantmen, were employed during the first phases of the landings, some 230 of them being ships of war necessary for anti-submarine protection, air cover, minesweeping and gunfire support. They were organized and sailed in sixteen convoys from Oran, Algiers, Bizerta, Tripoli, Palermo and Termini.

The weather on September 8th was calm and sunny. With aircraft overhead and guns manned, the convoys were gradually converging on their destinations. All the men in those ships must have known they were about to take part in an operation on the mainland of Italy, and that it would be contested. A few of the most senior officers may have been aware that the declaration of Italy's surrender was pending; but to

the great mass of soldiers and sailors in the expedition Italy was still in the war, and it must have been a matter of conjecture as to how the Italians would react in defence of their homeland. Then, at 5.30 p.m., as described in the last chapter, came that momentous and completely unexpected news of the Italian capitulation.

Behind the assault were the usual months of careful planning based on the accumulated lessons of previous amphibious operations. But various alternative landings in Italy had been entirely or partly planned, and it was not until August 19th that it was finally decided to give Salerno first priority. This led to an immense amount of eleventh-hour work for the planning staffs and all the naval commanders, the difficulties being enhanced because the forces concerned—Navy, Army and Air—and the ships in which they were to be carried, were widely separated between Italy, Sicily and North Africa. The preparation, reproduction and distribution of hundreds of copies of detailed operation orders was another problem which had to be overcome.

So minute were the final plans that the numbers and locations of vehicles in each hatch of every ship had previously been worked out, together with the precise sequence in which they should be discharged. As for the landings in Sicily, the time-table by which those hundreds of ships and craft in their sixteen convoys arrived at their various rendezvous and then launched the assault waves upon the designated beaches was intricate indeed. The matter of fuelling the warships and transports engaged in the operation, of food, supplies and munitions, even, in some instances, the supply of drinking water for the troops, all had to be patiently worked out in advance.

While the supreme naval command remained in the hands of the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham, the naval commander in immediate control of the Western Task Force working off the beaches was Vice-Admiral H. Kent Hewitt, U.S.N., with his flag in U.S.S. *Ancon* (Captain P. L. Mather, U.S.N.).

The Western Task Force was divided into two, a Southern Attack Force, under Rear-Admiral John L. Hall, Jr., U.S.N., in U.S.S. *Samuel Chase* (Captain Roger C. Heimer, U.S.N.), being responsible for landing American troops and their supplies over open beaches about six miles south of the River Sele near Agropoli. The Northern Attack Force, under the command of Commodore G. N. Oliver, R.N., with his broad pendant in H.M.S. *Hilary* (Captain Sir F. J. Paget, Bart.), was responsible for landing British troops and their supplies over beaches extending between the small rivers Picentino and Asa, about three miles south-east of the town of Salerno. Rear-Admiral Richard L. Conolly, U.S.N., with his flag in U.S.S. *Biscayne* (Commander E. H. Eckelmeyer, Jr., U.S.N.), though actually senior to Commodore Oliver, volunteered to serve under his orders in the Northern Attack Force.

Concurrently with these main assaults, two subsidiary landings were to take place on beaches to the west of the town of Salerno. The first, at Maiori, some six miles west, was to be carried out by American Ranger battalions with supporting arms; and the second, of Royal Marines and British Commandos, at Vietri sul Mare, about a mile west of Salerno. The naval commander for both these ventures was Commander S. H. Dennis, R.N., in H.M.S. *Prince Charles*.

The purpose of these subsidiary landings was to seize some of the higher ground to the north-west of Salerno with the assistance of parachutists, and to eliminate enemy batteries in the hills which could cover the anchorages to be occupied by the invasion ships, the beaches, and the areas inland of them. The captured positions would also overlook portions of the main roads leading from Salerno to Naples and to Avellino. They ran their tortuous ways through narrow and easily defended defiles in the foothills, and could only be accurately shelled from the sea with the assistance of observation parties spotting the fall of shot and reporting to the bombarding ships by radio.

A Task Group, under Captain Andrews, U.S.N., in the American destroyer *Knight*, was detailed to occupy the islands

of Capri, Ischia and Procida, off the Gulf of Naples, and, further afield, Ventotene and Ponza. This force was partly American, partly British, and included the Dutch gunboats *Flores* and *Soemba*.

Rear-Admiral Sir Philip L. Vian, with his flag in the cruiser *Euryalus* (Captain E. W. Bush), was in command of "Force V," which cruised some distance to seaward of the Gulf of Salerno. It included five aircraft-carriers, H.M.S. *Unicorn* (Captain Q. D. Graham), *Hunter* (Captain H. H. McWilliam), *Battler* (Captain F. M. R. Stephenson), *Stalker* (Captain H. S. Murray-Smith) and *Attacker* (Captain W. W. P. Shirley-Rollison), the last four being escort carriers—ships originally built as merchant vessels and converted to their new use in the United States. Their Seafire aircraft, manned by the Naval Air Arm, had the duty of providing part of the fighter cover over the inshore ships and beaches during the earlier phases of the assault until the airfields were captured by the Army and ready for use by Allied shore-based aircraft.

With Admiral Vian as extra cover were also the cruisers *Scylla* and *Charybdis*, commanded respectively by Captains J. A. P. MacIntyre and G. A. W. Voelcker; the British destroyers *Atherstone*, *Liddesdale*, *Holcombe*, *Cleveland*, *Puckeridge*, *Calpe*, *Haydon* and *Catterick*, with the *Krakowiak* and *Slazak* of the Polish Navy.

Vice-Admiral Sir Algernon Willis, with his flag in the battleship *Nelson* (Captain the Hon. G. H. E. Russell), commanded "Force H," the covering force to protect the expedition against possible attack by enemy surface forces, and to provide the fighter cover for "Force V." As originally constituted, it consisted of the battleships *Nelson*, *Rodney* (Rear-Admiral J. W. Rivett-Carnac), *Warspite*,\* *Valiant*,\* *King George V*\* (Captain T. E. Halsey), and *Howe*\* (Captain C. H. L. Woodhouse), the aircraft-carriers *Illustrious* (Captain R. L. B. Cunliffe), flying the flag of Rear-Admiral Clement Moody, and *Formidable* (Rear-Admiral A. G. Talbot), with the cruisers *Aurora*,\* *Penelope*,\* *Sirius*,\* and *Dido*,\* and attendant destroyers.



With the announcement of Italy's capitulation on the evening of September 8th and the surrender of the Italian fleet, there was no longer much risk of attack by surface ships. As mentioned in Chapter VII, the vessels of "Force H" marked with an asterisk were therefore temporarily detached for duties with the Italian fleet, or for the Allied occupation of Taranto. It will be seen in the course of this narrative that the *Valiant* and *Warspite*, and the four cruisers, later returned to the Gulf of Salerno for bombardment duties.

At the risk of being pedestrian, but to ensure completeness, the following vessels bearing names worked with the two attack forces, for bombardment, minesweeping and other purposes. It must be remembered, however, that many ships and craft bearing numbers only and working close inshore played a gallant and conspicuous part in the prolonged and arduous operations. Without the tenacity and devotion to duty of their thousands of anonymous officers and men under heavy fire, the task could never have been accomplished. Reviewing the landings on September 21st, Mr. Churchill referred to them as "the most daring operation we have yet launched, or which I think has ever been launched, on a similar scale."

### *Southern Attack Force*

Rear-Admiral John L. Hall, Jr., U.S.N., in U.S.S. *Samuel Chase*.

CRUISERS: *Philadelphia* (Captain P. Hendren), flagship of Rear-Admiral Lyal A. Davidson, *Savannah* (Captain R. W. Cary), *Boise* (Captain L. H. Thebaud).

DESTROYERS: *Plunkett*, *Niblack*, *Benson*, *Gleaves*, *Mayo*, *Wainwright*, *Trippe*, *Rhind*, *Rowan*, *Woolsey*, *Ludlow*, *Edison*, *Nicholson*, *Bristol*, *Cole*, *Bernadou* and *Dallas*, with Captain C. Wellborn, Jr., and Commanders G. L. Menecal and E. R. Durgin in command of the destroyer divisions.

MINESWEEPERS: *Strive* (Commander Messmer, U.S.N.), *Seer*, *Skill*, *Speed*, *Steady*, *Sustain*, *Symbol*, *Pilot* (Commander A. H. Richards, U.S.N.) and *Prevail*, together with fifteen

## SALERNO: OPERATION "AVALANCHE"

Y.M.S. ("Yard" minesweepers, for work in coastal waters and somewhat similar to the British M.M.S. or motor minesweepers).

NAVAL TUGS: U.S.S. *Hopi* and *Moreno*.

BRITISH WARSHIPS: H.M.S. *Abercrombie*, monitor (Captain G. V. B. Faulkner), *Delhi*, anti-aircraft cruiser (Captain A. T. G. C. Peachey), *Palomares* (Captain J. H. Jauncey), *Ulster Queen* (Captain M. H. J. Bennett, R.N.R.), together with the tank-landing ships H.M.S. *Boxer*, *Bruiser* and *Thruster*, the destroyers *Oakley* and *Hambledon*, and the fleet auxiliaries *Derwentdale* and *Empire Charmian*.

### Northern Attack Force

Commodore G. N. Oliver, R.N., in H.M.S. *Hilary*.  
Rear-Admiral R. L. Conolly, U.S.N., in U.S.S. *Biscayne*.

CRUISERS: *Mauritius* (Captain W. W. Davis), flying the flag of Rear-Admiral C. H. J. Harcourt, *Uganda* (Captain W. G. Andrews), *Orion* (Captain G. C. P. Menzies), H.M.S. *Roberts*, monitor (Captain H. M. C. Ionides) and *Alynbank*, anti-aircraft ship (Captain the Hon. V. H. Wyndham-Quin).

DESTROYERS: *Laforey* (Captain R. M. J. Hutton), *Loyal*, *Lookout*, *Tartar* and *Nubian*, together with the *Mendip* (Captain C. R. L. Parry), *Brecon*, *Blankney*, *Brocklesby*, *Blencathra*, *Eggesford*, *Quantock*, *Dulverton*, *Tetcott*, *Belvoir*, *Blackmore*, *Beaufort*, *Exmoor* and *Ledbury*, with the *Pindos* of the Greek Navy.

FLEET MINESWEEPERS: *Fly* (Captain J. W. Boutwood), *Rhyl* (Commander L. J. S. Ede), *Clacton*, *Polruan*, *Brixham*, *Stornoway*, *Bude*, *Espidgle*, *Circe*, *Cadmus*, *Acute*, *Albacore*, *Murine*, *Rothsay* and *Felixstowe*, with the —

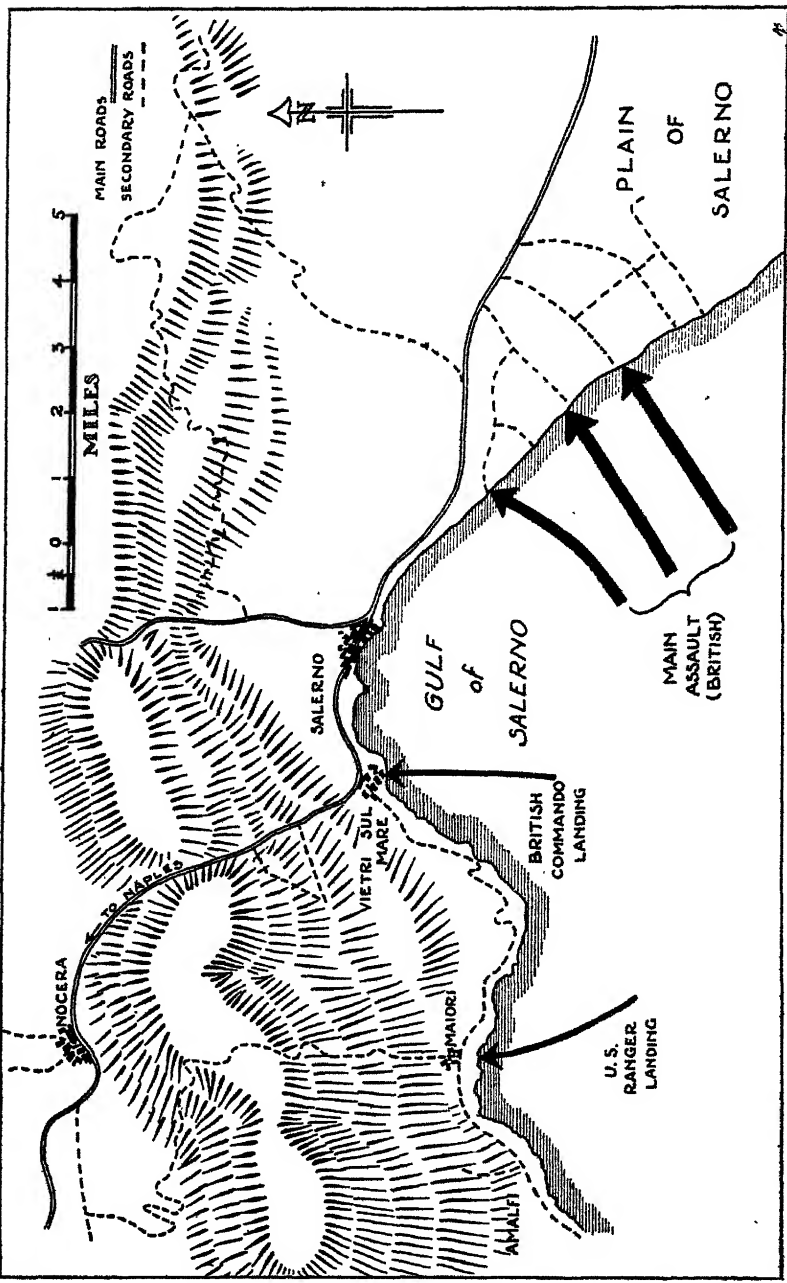
MINESWEEPING TRAWLERS: *Coverley*, *Tango*, *Piourette*, *Gavotte*, *Ensay*, *Mousa*, *Sheppey*, *St. Kilda*, *Minuet*, *Stella Carina*, *Visenda* and *Reighton Wyke*. Four British motor launches were also fitted for minesweeping, and working with the force were four British motor minesweepers and four American Y.M.S.

Other ships working with the Northern Attack Force under the orders of Commodore Oliver included H.M.S. *Glengyle*, *Royal Ulsterman*, *Princess Beatrix*, *Ulster Monarch*, *Royal Scotsman*, *Prince Albert*, *Prince Charles*, *Prince Leopold*, *Princess Charlotte* and *Princess Astrid*. These ships carried the British 56th Division besides British Commando troops and American Rangers. The other British division in the Northern Assault, the 46th, was carried in a large group of American L.S.Ts., each carrying her own assault boats. They were led by Rear-Admiral Conolly, U.S.N., in U.S.S. *Biscayne*. For convoy work, anti-submarine defence and general duties upwards of seventy small naval craft, British and American, worked with the Northern Attack Force.

## II

On that night of September 8th, when the convoys were approaching the Gulf of Salerno, the weather was perfect. There was a brilliant moon, with hardly a breath of wind or a ripple on the water. The night was very clear, and from dark on September 8th until about midnight, when it became hidden behind the hills, the commanding officer of one destroyer noted that the glare from Vesuvius was visible on the port bow. "It kept lookouts amused reporting it each time it flared up."

Commander Stratford H. Dennis, in the L.S.I.(M.) (Landing Ship Infantry, Medium) *Prince Charles*, as has been said, was in command of the subsidiary landings near Salerno itself. He had with him the L.S.Is. (M.) *Prince Albert* and *Prince Leopold*, with troops on board, the minesweepers *Albacore* and *Mutine*, the destroyers *Blackmore* and *Ledbury*, the minesweeping M.L. 135, and eight L.C.Is. (Landing Craft, Infantry) Nos. 229, 231, 232, 216, 299, 309, 33 and 35, with more troops and equipment. Soon after 9 p.m. flares were being dropped up moon from the convoy, and presently enemy aircraft came in to attack, flying very low over the water from the dark side. The destroyers' guns came into immediate action,



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the *Ledbury* (Lieutenant-Commander D. R. N. Murdoch) shooting down the first plane to arrive, which crashed in flames. Another turned away on fire, and still more were probably hit. The attacks lasted for just over two hours, and though the track of one torpedo passed close astern of the *Prince Charles*, the bombing was inaccurate and no ship was hit or damaged, somewhat surprisingly, as the convoy was clearly silhouetted in the moonlight. The fire of the two destroyers was a great deterrent. It was so bright and clear that at 11.30 p.m. ships were fixing their positions by bearings of the island of Capri.

Soon after midnight there began a heavy Allied air raid on Salerno, which produced some spectacular effects. A fire was started in the harbour area, which caused a very big explosion and a great flash lasting two or three seconds. The *Mendip*, *Brecon* and some other destroyers were immediately astern of the minesweepers, preceding a convoy of L.S.Ts. on their way in to beaches south-east of Salerno. The brilliant flash of the explosion against the intensely black outline of the high land silhouetted in sharp relief against the blue of the moonlit sky was of value. It enabled the *Brecon's* commanding officer, Lieutenant-Commander T. D. Herrick, "to fix the position of the fire fairly accurately, which was a very great help in fixing the position of the ship then and subsequently."

The *Mendip*, Captain Parry, with the *Brecon* and other destroyers in company, seem to have been the first British ships to engage the enemy's shore defences. Soon after 2 a.m. on the 9th, a German battery started shelling the L.S.Ts. Ordered by the *Biscayne* to "keep them quiet," the destroyers gladly retaliated. The *Brecon* herself opened up with six guns at 5,300 yards, and, as Herrick observes, "it was most gratifying to see how quickly any one battery closed down as soon as it was engaged."

Meanwhile Commander Dennis' convoy had reached its lowering positions off Maiori and Vietri sul Mare, with the land and its little clusters of white houses clearly visible in the moonlight. The L.C.As. (Landing Craft, Assault, normally

carried at ships davits) were lowered, and troops piled into them. Preceded by destroyers, the first flights of L.C.As. and L.C.Is. moved off towards their beaches soon after 2 a.m.

The craft carrying the American Rangers under Colonel Darby were released by the *Ledbury* off Maiori soon after three o'clock, and the landing was effected twenty minutes later without incident or opposition. The follow-up flights continued, and by 4.50 all equipment was ashore, the beach was secure, and the advanced troops were moving inland and had taken some prisoners. There was an enemy air attack a little later, which lasted until dawn. The *Ledbury* opened fire again, but found avoiding action difficult because of the congestion of ships and craft in the area. However, the nearest bomb fell 100 yards astern and did no damage. A couple of heavier bombs near-missed the *Prince Leopold* and gave her a severe shaking. All the troops and supplies detailed for Maiori were landed before daylight, and were clear of the beach by 6.30.

At Vietri, however, the landing of the Royal Marines and Commando troops under Brigadier Laycock was not so easy. At 2.5 a.m. the *Albacore*, *Mutine* and the minesweeping M.L. 135 were in station ahead of the destroyer *Blackmore*, with the L.C.As. astern of the latter. The approach began twelve minutes later, and the *Albacore* soon exploded a mine in her sweep. However, the release position was reached without further incident, and at 3.17 a.m. the first L.C.As. were moving shorewards on their correct course for the beach, to touch down without interference at 3.30.

But there was an enemy battery at Vietri which had to be neutralized, and at 3.19 the *Blackmore* (Lieutenant H. T. Harrel) had opened up with five rapid salvos. "Smoke from fires in Salerno was forming a light haze over the target area," Harrel reported, "but it was possible to see the road running up the cliff below the battery. . . . Fire shifted to houses on the beach. Five salvoes fired."

For five minutes nothing was seen ashore except the dull, reddish flashes of the British shell bursting. L.C.G. (Landing Craft, Gun) No. 6, meanwhile, had fired star-shell over the

battery and had also opened up with high explosive. Her commanding officer reported green, purple and yellow flares being fired from the battery, which were probably alarm signals. Then the enemy guns opened up on the *Blackmore*, which retaliated with vigour, made smoke, and took what avoiding action she could.

It was not yet daylight. The moon was still brilliant; but except where its pale light touched the undulating ripples caused by the movement of ships and craft, the sea under the shadow of the land was as black as polished ebony. With the golden flashes of the guns darting in and out of the rolling smoke, the duller red glow of shell bursting, the crossing streams of red and white tracer, and the whitened plumes thrown up in the water by falling projectiles with their driven slivers spurting like heavy hail, the scene was immensely spectacular and exciting. But no one had time to admire its beauty. The main object was to get the troops ashore.

As has been said, the first flight of L.C.As. beached at Vietri at 3.30 without opposition. They were not left undisturbed for long. While the landing of the assault troops was in progress, they came under intermittent fire from an enemy 4-inch mortar. It became more intense and accurate towards daylight. Landing craft on their way ashore and on the beach were soon having a gruelling time, two being sunk and others damaged.

Here are the experiences of L.C.T. 551, which beached at Vietri at 4.20 a.m. after being under fire on the way in. The beach roadways were soon rigged, and by 5.5 she had unloaded four lorries with anti-tank guns, two ambulances, and six lorries with stores without damage or casualties. By this time a British Commando had already captured the Vietri battery; but enemy mortars concealed in the hills above were pouring in a galling fire. L.C.T. 551 completed unloading stores by 6.10, and after embarking seven German prisoners started to raise her door with the intention of helping L.C.I. 299, which was stuck hard on the beach and severely damaged.

It was now that 551 was near-missed by several mortar

shells in rapid succession, the ship being holed in many places. A direct hit killed two seamen and badly wounded another, with a Royal Marine and three prisoners. All the wounded were carried ashore for medical attention, where the Royal Marine and two prisoners died. Further hits on 551 blew a large hole in her port bow, put one engine out of action, wrecked her winch and made several more holes in the hull. She was making water, while her door was jammed. The crew were armed and were ordered to take cover ashore, remaining in the vicinity of their craft. That afternoon they buried the dead.

The enemy shelling of the beaches near Salerno and their approaches, with the anchorages offshore, not to mention heavy mortar fire into the Salerno harbour itself, was to remain a continual nuisance for a fortnight. The hilly country was ideal for the concealment of artillery working with observers enjoying a bird's eye-view of all that went on, and most of the mischief seems to have been caused by mobile 88-mm. guns and a battery mounted on railway trucks. The Allied landings came as no surprise to the Germans. Kesselring had concentrated his forces, and ever since Sicily the Italian defection had been foreseen. Though the news of Italy's surrender broadcast on the evening of the 8th may have engendered certain feelings of optimism among some of those in the invasion fleet, the capitulation did not react in our favour. The Germans had simply bundled the Italians out of what coast defences there were, sometimes at the point of the bayonet, and the local resistance by well-placed forces was determined and extremely well organized. Isolated bodies of enemy troops fought to the last man.

Though Vietri and parts of Salerno seem partially to have been occupied by Commando troops on September 9th, there were still pockets of enemy resistance. Gunfire prevented the landing of stores by some landing craft, while the situation on the beach was no happier. L.C.T. 551 was still ashore on the morning of the 10th, when her crew made what repairs they could. At 10.55 a.m. she slipped her head-ropes and tried to



get off by weighing the kedge anchor by hand, the winch having been damaged by shell fire. "As this was being done," her commanding officer writes, "heavy machine-gun fire was directed at us from the shore at point-blank range. Some enemy troops must have filtered back into the town. The bridge and wheelhouse were heavily engaged. I turned the craft round and headed for the open sea at full speed, intending to break the last remaining strands of the kedge wire. Able Seaman F. G. Smithson, however, cut the kedge loose with an axe while accurate machine-gun fire was still sweeping the ship." Luckily, there were no further casualties.

It is difficult to piece together all that happened on D-day off Vietri sul Mare—a trying day of continual shell fire from the shore and bombardments from the sea, with not a few enemy air attacks. The landing craft came through their difficult ordeal with flying colours, and Commander Dennis spoke of the work of the *Blackmore* and *Ledbury* as "beyond all praise," while the minesweepers "carried out their orders to the letter."

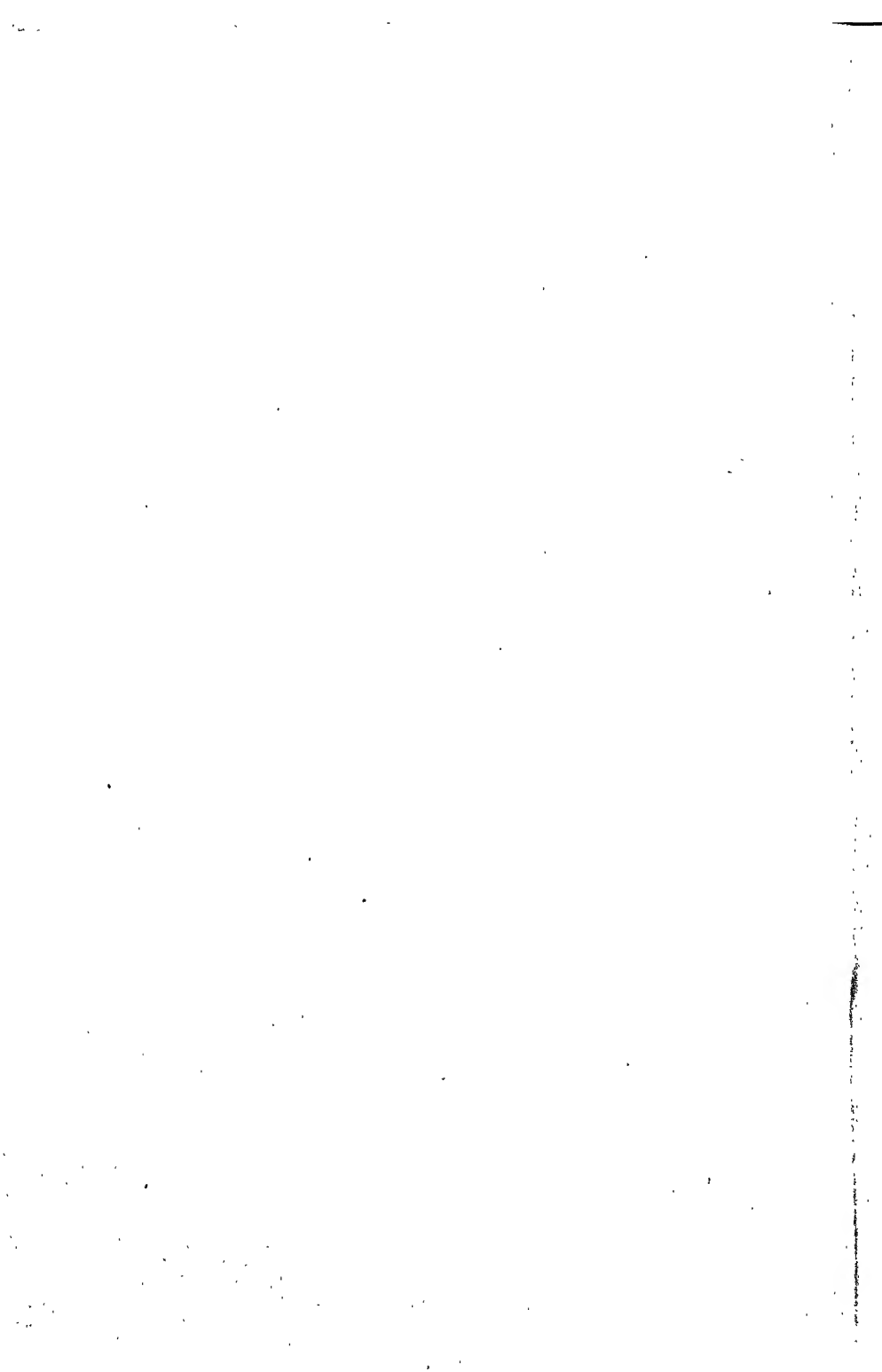
### III

Captain N. Vincent Dickinson was S.N.O.L. (or Senior Naval Officer, Landing), for the British 56th Division landing on one series of beaches to the south-east of Salerno. He was embarked in H.M.S. *Royal Ulsterman* (Lieutenant-Commander W. R. K. Clark, R.N.R.); until he landed to take over control on his beach on the afternoon of D-day. His convoy contained more than ninety ships and craft, a large number of them American, which had been intermittently bombed during the evening of September 8th without sustaining any casualties.

At 11.30 p.m. the 12th Minesweeping Flotilla, commanded by Captain J. W. Boutwood in the *Fly*, with the *Acute*, *Circe*, *Espiègle* and *Cadmus*, the *Rothsay* as dan-layer and mine-sweeping motor launches in the van as a protection against shallow mines, moved on ahead to sweep the water through which the convoy assault and supporting destroyers, with the L.C.Ts. and L.S.Ts. would pass. The area was thickly mined,



Admiral of the Fleet  
Sir Andrew B.  
Cunningham in-  
specting the ship's  
company of H.M.S.  
*Warspite*, his old  
flagship.



and, to anticipate, the 12th Flotilla accounted for twenty mines during the actual assault and 135 by September 13th. Except for one night at anchor, these little ships spent all their time up to September 18th either minesweeping or on anti-submarine patrol.

However, precisely at 1.30 a.m. on the 9th, as planned, the convoy reached its lowering position, the L.C.As. were lowered into the water, filled with troops, and formed up. Captain Boutwood's minesweepers with the M.Ls. were ahead of the procession as it moved shorewards in the moonlight. After them came the supporting destroyers—the *Laforey* (Captain Hutton), *Lookout* (Lieutenant-Commander A. G. Forman), *Loyal* (Lieutenant-Commander H. E. F. Tweedie), *Mendip* (Captain Parry) and *Brecon* (Lieutenant-Commander Herrick). Astern of the destroyers came the first flights of landing craft.

At 2.55, the minesweepers having finished that part of the work, Captain Hutton went on with his three "L" class destroyers, and at 3.17 started "softening" the defences by opening fire on the beach for four minutes. L.C.Gs. were also engaged, while L.C.Rs. (Landing Craft, Rocket) fired their salvoes of rockets at the beach a few minutes before the first waves of landing craft touched down at 3.40. The sight of those rocket craft in action baffled description. First the whistling roar and trails of arching fire as the rockets hurtled shorewards; then the deafening thunder of many simultaneous detonations as the projectiles struck and burst in gouts of orange flame and black smoke. The effects were numbing. As one who saw them wrote: "The effect of the fire of these craft when ahead of them is quite terrifying when it is expected. Therefore it can be calculated what greater effect it has on the morale and being of an enemy, not forewarned." It is hardly surprising that some of the Germans manning their beach defences were "seen coming out of their holes in a dazed condition."

There was moderate fire from medium calibre guns during the final stages of the initial approach. It was never accurate

enough to be really serious, though an L.C.I. and two L.C.Ts. were hit. However, as one observer records, the gunfire caused the landing craft to unload and clear the beaches in record time. One officer in an L.C.A. said that the six craft of his flotilla deployed off the beach at 3.30 a.m. "Almost immediately one L.C.A. was hit, with one soldier mortally wounded. At much the same time, another craft was hit by a mortar shell and damaged, but had no casualties. Just before touching down at 3.55, there was fairly intense mortar fire on the beach ahead, but the troops got ashore with only a few casualties."

Our first troops were ashore; but the beach was heavily mined and the enemy's resistance was stubborn. So far from the assault being a surprise, the Germans were fully prepared. At 4.15 Tiger tanks appeared on one beach, shooting at our troops already ashore and at landing craft on their way in. The beaches were well covered by enemy machine guns and snipers, with mortars and mobile batteries further inland. Though a battalion at one landing place cleared a way through the minefields and moved inland, a strong German attack upon another pushed our troops back almost to the water's edge. The battle surged to and fro with increasing violence.

At 5.45, as daylight was approaching, those in the *Laforey* saw streams of coloured tracer sweeping along the beaches. A salvo fell close to the ship. A landing craft was hit and set on fire on the beach. Hutton promptly took his ship inshore and opened fire on the battery responsible at 1,500 yards, finally closing to 800. An enemy ammunition dump blew up with a shattering explosion. The whole area became shrouded in the smoke and dust of battle.

At 5.58 enemy guns opened fire on the *Laforey* at point-blank range, using semi-flashless ammunition, with at least one gun firing tracer. "We gave them everything we had," Hutton writes, "and the battery was silenced shortly after 0600 after two more good explosions, but not before *Laforey* had been hit five times." A shell had burst in a boiler room, one stoker being killed and two ratings wounded. "I knew *Laforey* had been hit in the boiler room," he continues, "and

as the ship was only a few hundred yards from the shore it was necessary to retire. I ordered the *Lookout* to come into action with me, which she did at once." The *Lookout*, which had already been in action, closed into within 1,000 yards and continued to fire as the *Laforey* retired to effect what repairs she could.

By 6.15 it was daylight, and enemy aircraft appeared and started bombing. Indeed, bombing had begun earlier on the ships further out, for at about 5.20 the nine large L.S.Is. lying stopped awaiting the return of their craft from the beaches were ringed all round with brilliant parachute flares and had about a dozen bombs dropped in their near vicinity.

The squadrons of L.S.Ts. had started to move in to the beaches at dawn. Led by their senior officer, Rear-Admiral F. Burges-Watson, who was serving as a captain, they were a most heartening sight to everybody as they streamed in towards the beaches at full speed, carrying the guns, vehicles and other heavy equipment much needed by the Army. The landings were still under very heavy and accurate fire. Ordered not to beach immediately because of this shelling, some of the Dukws carrying anti-tank guns swam off from the L.S.Ts. and got safely ashore. As the light grew, enemy guns opened a still heavier fire on the craft working off the beaches. Excellently concealed and using flashless ammunition, it was impossible to locate them, so at about 6.30 Hutton asked for cruiser support. The cruisers *Mauritius*, *Orion* and *Uganda*, with the monitor *Roberts* and the destroyers *Tartar* and *Nubian*, took up their bombarding positions and were soon in action. They were engaged throughout the day, and to the hard-pressed troops ashore their potent help was more than welcome. The *Roberts*, firing on one occasion at 21,500 yards with her 15-inch guns, pitched all her shell in the target area. The cruisers and destroyers, working closer inshore and clearly visible to the men on the beaches, had a most heartening effect upon all who saw them in action against enemy field batteries and concentrations of tanks, mechanical transport and infantry. Reports coming back from the forward observation officers

contained such remarks as: "Hit first round." "Area well plastered." "Battery silenced." "Good shoot. One explosion." "Absolutely destroyed." "Infantry well pleased with shoot."

Meanwhile, by 7 a.m. the *Laforey* had made temporary repairs to a hole three feet by one on the waterline abreast of No. 1 boiler-room. It was stuffed with hammocks, with a collision mat overall. Other splinter holes in the hull were plugged, and, apart from the fact that one boiler was useless, the ship was again ready for action, and was engaging enemy targets off and on throughout the whole of that eventful day. The shooting of the destroyers had been deadly indeed, a senior military officer on the beach informing the *Laforey* that the destroyer bombardment of the coastal battery had been most effective. Several guns had been reduced to scrap-iron, and the ground was littered with dead bodies. The next morning some of the *Laforey's* officers had a chance of inspecting the battery for themselves. It consisted of six 88-mm. guns surrounded by nests of machine guns. Three of the guns and several machine guns had received direct hits, and the battery position was a shambles.

The *Loyal*, too, was in hot action, and fired no fewer than 1,714 rounds of ammunition that first day. She also was damaged, and, with the *Laforey*, had to leave the area on September 10th for repairs.

The *Mendip*, *Brecon*, *Blankney* (Lieutenant-Commander D. H. R. Bromley), and other destroyers were constantly engaged during the 9th, silencing batteries, exploding ammunition dumps, engaging enemy transport, troop concentrations and strong points.

The first L.S.T. at Captain Dickinson's landing beached at 9 a.m. under heavy fire, which continued throughout the day. The landing places had been well registered by the enemy, and smoke-screens were more of a hindrance than a help. They merely made beaching and unbeaching more difficult. Many of the L.S.Ts. and landing craft were hit, some severely.

L.S.T. 319 (Commander John G. Sutton, R.N.), went in at full speed at 10.50 a.m., with the beach under spasmodic

gunfire. The work of unloading began; but within ten minutes the enemy shelling became intense and accurate. From then until 2.10 p.m., when she unbeached, the ship was under constant gunfire. One shell burst fifty feet from her ramp, causing many casualties and delaying unloading. There was difficulty with some of the heavy vehicles in the deep and rough sand, soldiers and sailors man-handling and digging them out under heavy fire. Though 319 herself was frequently straddled, she was not actually hit. Splinters, however, caused various casualties on the upper deck, and still more on the beach. From about noon casualties were being brought on board. The wardroom was converted into a hospital for sixty wounded, some of them with very severe injuries. They were transferred to the hospital ship *St. David* later in the afternoon. Commander Sutton wrote in glowing terms of the work of his first lieutenant during the ordeal. He was Lieutenant-Commander R. B. Wadsworth, of the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve, who "carried out his duties of unloading on the ramp with complete disregard for his own safety and under continuous shell fire."

L.S.T. 363 (Lieutenant-Commander J. B. McReynolds, R.N.R.), was hit several times, one shell striking a vehicle on the upper deck and passing on into a fuel tank, where it was later found unexploded.

L.S.T. 430 (Lieutenant-Commander W. H. Laws, R.N.R.), was hit by a large shell on the starboard side, with a direct hit on the bridge, which seriously wounded the captain in the back, legs and arms. The first lieutenant, Lieutenant P. Davy, R.N.V.R., took command and beached the ship. All the time vehicles were being discharged the beach and ship were under bombardment. She was repeatedly hit, one bursting shell setting fire to a truck laden with ammunition in the tank space. The fire was extinguished largely by the good work of Warrant Engineer W. D. G. Miller, R.N.R., who tackled it single-handed until others came to help him. Had he not got the fire-fighting apparatus working at once, the results might have been disastrous.



The L.S.Ts. and landing craft of all types, manned for the most part by men who were going into action for the first time, gave valiant service on that first day of the landings, as did the other ships and craft working inshore. On one sector of beaches alone, Captain Dickinson's, 1,600 vehicles and 50 tons of stores and supplies were discharged during the first day, all under heavy shell fire.

On all the beaches, in spite of the difficulties, troops and their equipment continued to be landed. The orders to the effect that the assault was "to be pressed home with relentless vigour, regardless of loss or difficulty," was obeyed to the letter.

#### IV

Though details are lacking, the situation on the American beaches south of the Sele River were no easier. Preceded by minesweepers and supported by the U.S. destroyers *Bristol*, *Ludlow* and *Edison*, the first waves of landing craft touched down before dawn at the appointed time, very soon to come under heavy fire, which was replied to by the destroyers. As on the British beaches, there were snipers and enemy machine-gun nests just above high-water mark, and as daylight came the enemy's fire intensified. Beach parties and shore engineers were forced to take cover in hastily-dug foxholes while bullets whistled over and around them. On one occasion three German tanks approached within 200 yards of the foxholes and shelled the landing craft coming in to the shore. There were many casualties, which were increased by the low-flying attacks of enemy aircraft.

Meanwhile the bombarding forces, which included the American cruisers *Philadelphia*, *Savannah*, *Boise*, many destroyers, and the British monitor *Abercrombie* with her 15-inch guns, were shooting hard at the enemy's shore defences, batteries, tanks, troop concentrations and anything hostile that showed itself. Their fire was controlled by aircraft and by observation parties ashore. They had difficulty in

locating the enemy batteries; but even so their heavy bombardment gave the Army much-needed help at a time when the situation was very critical. An American general officer ashore sent a message to the Commander of the Fire Support Unit: "Thank God for the Blue Belly Navy ships. Probably could not have stuck out on blue and yellow beaches. Stout fellows. Please tell them so."

The Germans were defending their positions with a desperate ferocity which afterwards came to be considered as normal, but which in September, 1943, provided a severe test for the assaulting troops, many of whom were in action for the first time. On some of the beaches, British and American, enemy artillery, tanks and infantry met the Allies almost at the shore line, and on others the first few waves of troops were suffered to land, and were then pinned down by artillery, mortars and machine guns, which also brought landing craft under heavy fire. The well-sited and numerous strong-points poured a withering fire into men disembarking, with tanks sometimes pocketing small bodies of troops, who had to dig in. On some of the beaches on D-day it was touch and go whether a foothold could be established and maintained.

As has been said, monitors, cruisers, destroyers, L.C.Gs. and other support craft came to the rescue in a precarious situation. Even so, with enemy batteries and strong-points artfully concealed in very close country, accurate gunfire from the sea was extraordinarily difficult. There were forward observation officers ashore with their radio sets; but their spotting was greatly interrupted by enemy shell fire, and occasionally by the destruction of their instruments. Moreover, Allied and German troops often became hopelessly intermingled, with the positions of neither known to the bombarding ships.

On D-day alone, however, fire-support ships engaged a minimum of 132 targets, and expended a prodigious amount of ammunition. It served its purpose, for naval gunfire finally forced the retirement of all the German formations from their positions near the beaches that had not been annihilated.

By sunset on September 9th the initial opposition to the landings had temporarily been overcome. The smoke and dust of battle subsided, and the steady pulsating roar of heavy gunfire gave way to occasional single reports, mingled with the staccato chatter of machine guns and small arms. The enemy was falling back, with the Allies feeling their way after them across the width of the Plain of Salerno, which lay between the beaches and the hills to the eastward.

The night came down clear and starlit, with a moon later. But it brought little respite to any soldiers or sailors. The landing craft and invaluable Dukws still chugged ceaselessly shoreward with men, guns, vehicles and supplies, and off again for fresh loads. As the operation orders emphasized, it was upon the rapid follow-up of reserves and the swift landing of supplies that the assault relied for the impetus which alone could sustain it and give complete success.

Thanks to the Allied superiority in the air, enemy air activity on D-day had had little more than a nuisance value and hardly interfered with the landings. There were a few low-flying, strafing attacks upon some of the beaches, with bursts of concentrated formation bombing against the ships in the anchorages off the northern and southern landings.

Captain Peachey, of the *Delhi*, the anti-aircraft cruiser working with the Southern Attack Force, had his gun's crews closed up all day and constantly in action. He reported various attacks, one, in the morning, bringing twenty-one sticks of bombs bursting in the *Delhi's* close vicinity, and another, after dark, under brilliant flare illumination, producing thirty sticks of bombs among the ships in the crowded anchorage.

The battle for the beaches had temporarily been won; but victory was not yet in sight. Indeed, the real struggle had hardly begun, and the crisis had yet to be mastered. The fact that all the defences were manned by Germans, and the stubborn ferocity of their resistance, had prevented the Allies from establishing themselves on shore as rapidly as planned. By the evening of D-day, neither the port of Salerno nor the airfields were in our hands.

The Germans, licking their wounds, had certainly withdrawn from the beaches. But Kesselring was feverishly concentrating all his available troops and armour, while his artillery in the hills still dominated the beaches and the Plain of Salerno, in which the Allied Army must regroup. Each flight of landing craft approaching the beaches, the beaches themselves, with every ammunition or supply dump, each concentration of troops, tanks, guns or vehicles, would still be under fire from the enemy's mobile batteries overlooking the whole area.

The Allied troops had not been landed in any really great strength, and sooner or later Kesselring must launch his inevitable counter-attack in an effort to drive us back into the sea. Moreover, we were not aware that the Germans had also at their command a new and potent weapon, the radio-controlled bomb. At the time it was erroneously described as a "rocket-bomb." In point of fact, it had only the slightest gliding capacity, and emitted a smoke trail from the glare in the tail to enable the bomb-aimer to keep the missile in sight and in line with its target all the way down.

The radio-controlled bomb might not be of great utility against troops; but against ships operating off the coast it was a menace. To this new-fangled weapon we had no immediate antidote.

## CHAPTER IX

## SALERNO: CRISIS AND RECOVERY

## I

DAY-FIGHTER cover over the assault area was provided by Lightnings and Spitfires from Sicily augmented by Seafires of the Naval Air Arm operating from Sir Philip Vian's Force "V" of five escort carriers. Night-fighter cover was given by Beaufighters from Sicily. The plans for day-fighter cover aimed at keeping about forty shore-based aircraft continuously over the area, supplemented by up to ten Seafires from Force "V."

The naval aircraft had a large area to cover in visibility which was usually poor so far as flying was concerned, while as the weather varied between a flat calm and what the Navy usually refers to as "light airs" from no settled direction, the task of landing high-speed fighters on the flight decks of the comparatively slow escort carriers was a matter of some difficulty and danger.

By the original plan, it was the intention only to operate these naval aircraft for the first two days, as it was hoped that the airfield at Montecorvino, between two and three miles inland from some of the British beaches, would have been overrun by the Army on D-day, and made serviceable for their use and for other aircraft flown in from Sicily by D + 1, September 10th.

But it was not to be. Because of the heavy opposition to the landings, the Army's programme was delayed and the aircraft of Admiral Vian's force were actually called upon to operate for three and a quarter days, which brought the relatively small number concerned to the limit of their endurance.

In this period 713 sorties were flown by the five carriers

during the forty-two hours of daylight. They had various combats and some success, though the small number of enemy aircraft met was intensely disappointing to the naval pilots. There is no doubt, however, that their early presence had a most valuable deterrent effect, which greatly contributed to the success of the operation. On September 11th Sir Andrew Cunningham signalled to Admiral Vian, "Well done. Your boys have done splendidly," while ten days later, when Force "V" broke up, the Commander-in-Chief again congratulated the commanding officers, officers and ships' companies on the "excellent work" performed. Like them, he regretted the naval aircraft had not enjoyed more opportunities of action. Nevertheless, the high standard of training and operation reflected great credit on all concerned, particularly as the carriers had little time to work together as a unit before engaging in a major operation of great importance and some hazard. The decision to carry out the landings, he concluded, was founded in the first instance on the presence of the cover and protection afforded by aircraft of the Naval Air Arm flown originally from aircraft-carriers at sea.

We have a description of what happened at Montecorvino airfield from Lieutenant G. A. Woods, R.N.V.R., of the Naval Air Arm, who was in charge of a naval communications party landed with the first assault troops for the purpose of maintaining radio touch between the airfield and the carriers at sea. The party was typically English, for Woods himself hailed from Boston, Lincolnshire, Petty Officer Telegraphist Edmund Smith from New Cross, London, Telegraphists B. Cawthorne, J. Lussey and D. K. Mountford, respectively, from Sheffield, Liverpool and Tulsa Hill, and Coder E. Thurston also from Sheffield.

This little unit, complete with its transmitting set, stores, food and water in a truck, landed at dawn, and after sundry adventures on the beach moved forward with an infantry convoy. They reached the grass-grown airfield without much incident, and within two minutes of unloading their vehicle established communications with their parent ship far away out

at sea. It was not long, however, before Woods and his men realized that Montecorvino could not be operated as an airfield for the time being. It was fairly closely overlooked by densely wooded hills providing excellent cover for enemy guns, which opened accurate fire on everything that moved or showed itself. One naval pilot landing had hardly left his aircraft when a direct hit destroyed it. There were also enemy snipers on the far edge of the aerodrome less than a mile away, whose attentions were "annoying." It was no case of the Italians handing over the airfield to the Allies with bouquets of flowers and speeches of welcome. On the contrary.

British troops advanced and occupied portions of the site, though for six days the shelling from the concealed guns continued. "It was pretty heavy at times," as Woods described it, going on to say that Smith, who was on his feet for forty-eight consecutive hours doing everything from supervising the coding of messages to brewing the inevitable tea, was the life and soul of the party. "He seemed positively miserable when the shelling stopped," said the lieutenant. "The German shell made a peculiar shrill whine which we heard long before they reached us. Smith seemed to enjoy the excitement of it, and I must say I found it a good deal more interesting than sitting doing the chores in some office."

A few odd Seafires landed from time to time at considerable risk to themselves, and took off again after being refuelled by a Servicing Unit of the Royal Air Force. But, constantly under fire, and with the tide of battle surging all around it, the airfield could not be used systematically.

Two days passed like this, and then, at about 10 p.m. on the moonlit night of September 11th, the enemy launched a counter-attack. It was an exciting and spectacular experience. Woods described the roar of British artillery as a heavy barrage hurtled overhead, with the shell flashing and bursting over and along the far side of the aerodrome and in the wooded hills beyond. From the other direction, as the enemy advanced, came the rattle of heavy machine guns, and streams of red, yellow and green tracer.

The naval party, armed only with tommy-guns and revolvers, was ordered to evacuate, and in a hurry. The attack had come suddenly, and Woods and his men were caught at an evil moment. The batteries of their radio set had run down, so they were using the batteries of the truck for transmitting. The vehicle was temporarily immobilized, and the party had to leave on foot after dismantling the radio set as best they could. Stumbling along in the moonlight carrying all the confidential books and cyphers, they were furious at their sudden eviction, having just settled themselves comfortably into one of the aerodrome buildings. Most of their personal belongings had to be left behind.

They spent the rest of that wakeful night at Brigade Headquarters about a mile down the road towards the sea, only to return to the old position on the aerodrome next morning when the Germans had been driven back. For another three days the shelling continued, and then became spasmodic, until it finally died away altogether on the enemy's retirement.

After being a fortnight on the site, Woods and his men were ordered to pack up and return whence they came. "I think Smith was quite the unhappiest man on earth when our sailing orders arrived," the officer said. "He seemed to enjoy every minute of our picnic as a novel and refreshing change to his ordinary job. I suppose it was a bit of a contrast; but all I can say is he was the mainstay of our little outfit while the show lasted. All the men were excellent, and Lussey, when things were quiet enough, turned out to be a marvellous cook on corned beef and what else we could scrounge."

## II

It is difficult to keep to strict chronology; but on September 10th there was no great change in the situation. The beaches were still under shell fire, and the port of Salerno could not be used for unloading because of the heavy mortar fire from the hills overlooking it. The Germans ashore still resisted stubbornly, and the Allied troops were engaged in heavy fighting



in difficult country and making very slow progress. The *Mauritius*, *Orion*, *Roberts* and destroyers, off the northern beaches, continued their most effective bombardments, as did the American cruisers and destroyers, with H.M.S. *Abercrombie*, further south. In this same area the American Admiral reported that the three British L.S.Ts., H.M.S. *Boxer*, *Bruiser* and *Thruster*, had "turned in an excellent performance," but that many of the boats' crews were beginning to show signs of exhaustion after working continuously without relief or sleep and under the intense strain of constant bombing and shelling. The Dukws were invaluable. It was lucky indeed that the weather remained perfect.

The air attacks against the ships in the anchorages continued, and on September 10th the *Delhi* was again in frequent action, shooting down at least two enemy aircraft over the southern anchorage, while a third was seen to explode in mid-air. "The measure of success against enemy aircraft has resulted in a highly competitive spirit among all guns' crews," Captain Peachey reported, "so much so that the ship's company have applied to remain continuously at action stations. Ship's routine has been modified accordingly."

The heaviest raids took place before dawn, and again at dusk and during the night. At 7.30 p.m. on the 10th what was later realized to be a radio-controlled bomb, the harbinger of many others, fell into the sea off the northern beaches, while there was a heavy air raid on the ships in the northern anchorage between 10.25 and 11.45. It was during this attack that the *Brecon* was straddled by five heavy bombs, two landing 30 yards to port, another couple 50 yards to starboard, and a delay action bomb 40 yards to starboard. The latter exploded with a mighty shock five seconds later. "Everyone got a fright," wrote Herrick, the *Brecon's* captain, "but beyond breaking most of the wardroom cups and a lavatory pan no damage was done. We were extremely lucky."

Bombarding most of the day, and with their crews at action stations all through the night, the destroyers were having a strenuous time. The *Brecon* could not use her galley, as the

Diesel oil tank for its use had to be run down to avoid the risk of fire. As hot food was unobtainable, someone suggested using the steam poker, a perforated copper tube at the end of a steam-filled flexible copper hose, normally used for heating the wardroom bath. They found they could boil soup, cocoa or water for tea in a very short time, and could even make porridge. So for thirty-six hours the bathroom became the galley.

September 11th was a day of considerable anxiety. Commodore Oliver's Northern Attack Force had its usual air raid at dawn, which lasted about an hour and did little damage. Apart from that, however, enemy air activity in this area was very slight. The anchorage had been shelled intermittently by guns of medium calibre ever since the landing, to which nobody seems to have paid much attention. That afternoon, however, it came under the more accurate fire of heavier guns mounted on the road or railway north of Salerno, so it became necessary to move shipping further south. At 8 a.m. that morning the port of Salerno itself had been entered by H.M.S. *Barndale*, a boom defence vessel, Lieutenant R. L. Jones, R.N.R., with the tug *Favourite* and a coaster. They were unable to do much in the way of clearance or unloading, for the mortars in the hills soon opened up a heavy fire and the harbour had to be cleared of shipping.

The American Rangers on the left flank, landed at Maiori in the early hours of the 9th, were encountering increased opposition as they thrust their way inland over difficult, mountainous country, with many thick woods and ravines. The ground was ideal for harassing tactics on the part of small bodies of determined enemy troops. Reinforcements to assist them were sent to Maiori in fourteen L.C.T's.

Though the Rangers had had a quiet landing, they had much hard fighting later, and under Colonel Darby's inspiring leadership accomplished a most difficult task with magnificent success. They had at all costs to hold the high ground commanding the narrow defiles between Salerno and Naples. With the help of reinforcements, they held these positions against all comers for nearly three weeks until

the main Allied attack broke through into the Plain of Naples.

Meanwhile, the work of disembarking troops and supplies was carried on over the northern beaches, which remained under constant shell fire. The continual arrival of armoured and other units, with their vehicles and masses of equipment, was becoming almost an embarrassment in the confined beach-head. Roads and dumps were becoming densely packed. They provided an ideal target for aircraft, and the lack of any determined air attack was a matter for congratulation. The cruisers and destroyers still continued their heavy bombardments from the sea.

Throughout September 11th, however, there were heavy air attacks on the ships of Rear-Admiral Hall's Southern Attack Force, fifty enemy aircraft being reported over the area at one period. At 9.35 a.m., while in her bombarding position, the cruiser *Philadelphia*, Rear-Admiral Davidson's flagship, was narrowly missed by one of the new radio-controlled bombs. It burst with a very heavy explosion within 15 feet of the ship's side; but though she was considerably damaged she could still operate.

Nine minutes after the *Philadelphia's* first experience of the new weapon, however, her sister ship, the *Savannah*, was hit. There were ten or twelve enemy aircraft in sight at the time at a height of about 18,000 feet. They were being engaged, when something emitting a trail of smoke was seen to detach itself from the formation and glide down towards the ship on a long, straight slant. Observers took it for a falling plane, until, when almost immediately overhead, it toppled over and dived steeply on its target at terrific speed. It struck No. 3 turret, just before the bridge, to be deflected by a gun and burst deep in the ship in the lower landing-room. The heavy explosion completely destroyed the turret and caused about 100 casualties, with bad flooding in the forepart of the ship. Those who saw the great upheaval thought it impossible that the *Savannah* would remain afloat; but she did, to reach Malta and to be put into dry dock for temporary repairs before steaming to the United States for refit.

Many people will have read of the ordeal of four of the *Savannah's* radio operators, who found themselves trapped in a small communications compartment far below when the explosion took place. The electricity failed, and all they had was the dim auxiliary lighting provided by batteries, which would not last indefinitely. The watertight door was blocked with shattered wreckage, and because of the flooding and increased draught of the ship the compartment was soon entirely submerged, the water seeping into the interior until it was up to the men's shoulders. Salvage vessels came alongside, pumps were started, and the water level fell to the men's waists. But no power on earth could free them from their steel box until the water surrounding it could be drained away, and this was impossible until the ship was docked. For five days they remained in their prison, wondering, no doubt, if the bulkheads might not collapse to bring the water flooding in to drown them. Words of encouragement, and a certain amount of fresh air, came to them through a 2½-inch voice-pipe connecting the compartment with the bridge. The same method was used for passing small quantities of food and water; but a more terrible experience it is impossible to imagine.

## III

On the night of September 11th-12th, having concentrated sufficient troops and armour, the enemy started a series of counter-attacks which nearly ended in the Allies being forced back into the sea. Among other small towns, the Germans recaptured Battipaglia, and still continued to advance. The situation ashore became tense and precarious. The Allies were thin on the ground—too thin to withstand the enemy onslaught. Artillery had been landed; but the narrow strips of ground held did not permit our guns to be deployed and used with full effect. The roads leading inland were narrow, and the numerous irrigation ditches among the citrus groves were serious obstacles to the tanks. The beaches, where troops and supplies continued to be landed, were still under heavy shell

fire. If the German thrust could not be held, there was danger of the enemy driving a deep wedge between the British and Americans, and isolating both in small, detached level areas dominated by gunfire from the hills and already densely congested with troops, guns, vehicles and stores.

The heavy naval bombardments continued throughout September 12th; but though Montecorvino airfield was in our hands, it was still under fire and could only be used for forced landings. Nor could the port of Salerno be used by shipping, because of the heavy mortar fire. Reinforcements of troops had been called for from Sicily and North Africa. The British cruisers *Euryalus*, *Scylla* and *Charybdis* were ordered to Tripoli at their utmost speed to embark others.

The enemy air raids continued, and before dawn on September 13th the British hospital ships *Newfoundland* and *Leinster*, lying out at sea and fully illuminated as laid down by the Geneva Convention, were wantonly bombed, the *Newfoundland* being sunk with heavy loss of life. The Germans were bent on destroying all the shipping they could. To them the sanctity of the Red Cross meant nothing.

The 13th saw the military situation worse than ever. The Allied troops were fighting desperately, but in what seemed a losing battle. The heaviest weight of the German attack coming down the Sele River continued to gain ground until it had driven a deep bulge between the British and Americans to within three miles of the beaches. The entire military line was in jeopardy, and, to add to the other difficulties, the enemy launched more radio-controlled-bomb attacks upon the gun-fire support ships off the beaches.

To the southward the *Philadelphia* was attacked and missed no fewer than four times during the afternoon, though this did not prevent her from firing 1,169 6-inch shell at enemy positions in the course of the day. At 2.40 p.m. the British cruiser *Uganda*, while bombarding off the northern beaches, was attacked by an aircraft flying very high. The bomb seemed to be flying in company with the parent plane, until it turned and came down in a long glide, emitting the usual trail of

smoke. When nearly over the ship it dived at a very steep angle, to strike the *Uganda* aft. It penetrated seven decks before exploding, to cause severe structural damage besides killing fourteen men and seriously wounding another nine, of whom two ultimately died. Three engines were put out of action, and there was a split 30 feet long in the bottom of the engine-room. The flooding was severe, with 1,300 tons of water on board which could not be pumped out before patching. They shored up the bulkheads and made what other repairs they could, eventually to find that the steering gear was serviceable and that they could still steam on one propeller. With the American tug *Narragansett* in attendance and escorted by two destroyers, the ship reached Malta in safety. The departure of the *Uganda* at a critical time when every bombarding ship was sorely needed was as sad a blow to others as it was to her own officers and men. She had given valuable service, and in something over four days had shelled twenty-nine enemy targets with her 6-inch guns.

The destroyer *Brecon* had seen the *Uganda* hit, and closed to see if she could help. "Picked up a naval war correspondent, Ian Munro," wrote Herrick in his report. "He had no clothes or gear, as *Uganda* had been hit by a rocket bomb outside his cabin as he was packing. He was somewhat shaken."

That entry in the *Brecon's* report serves as a reminder that the naval correspondents afloat faced exactly the same risks as anyone else. In their difficult search for news, they rarely missed a chance, and danger was the last thing they considered. To the annoyance of those responsible, they used frequently and surreptitiously to go ashore with the first assault troops. Technically, they were non-combatants and not entitled to carry weapons. Their duty was to observe and faithfully to report, and they repeatedly risked their lives to do so. They were brave men, with nothing to gain from their hardihood except a column and a headline.

On the whole, September 13th was a depressing day for those afloat, a day of anxiety and uncertainty. The news from

the shore was definitely bad, and the position showed signs of becoming desperate. Stores, equipment, guns and vehicles were piling up in the dumps near the beaches, and were all being shelled. On the beaches themselves more and more wounded were waiting to be embarked under heavy fire. The Navies were bombarding; but the enemy mobile batteries were difficult to locate. The Germans were still advancing, and in the afternoon it was reported that the town of Salerno might be attacked during the night. As the harbour was under heavy mortar fire and the naval port party could do no useful work, it was decided to withdraw it and to leave a small communications party behind.

There was no knowing what the morrow might bring, and the Naval Commander, Vice-Admiral H. Kent Hewitt, U.S.N., in the *Ancon*, realizing the gravity of the situation, had asked for more and heavier support fire. Reinforcements were soon on their way—among other ships the cruisers *Aurora* and *Penelope*, with the battleships *Valiant* and *Warspite*, each with their eight 15-inch guns.

By September 14th the fury of the enemy attack had forced the Allies to give still more ground, and General Mark Clark, commanding the Fifth Army, was forced to consider the possibility of having to evacuate one or other of the narrow beach-heads separated by the River Sele. It was lucky it never came to pass. Evacuation was a task which the Navies had never really considered, and for which they were ill prepared. Apart from its serious moral effect and ultimate consequences, the operation of re-embarking troops under heavy fire could only have resulted in ghastly casualties, with the loss of hundreds of guns, tanks and miscellaneous vehicles and thousands of tons of valuable stores.

News to the effect that the Germans alone, after Italy's defection, had defeated and driven the Allies back into the sea with heavy losses in men and material on their first opposed landing on the mainland of Europe must have had the most serious psychological repercussions all over the world. Apart from enhancing the prestige of the German Army to the

detriment of the British and American, evacuation from Salerno would have appeared to the uninitiated in much the same light as the previous withdrawals from Dunkirk and Greece. There would have been gloom and despondency, and the good effect of the conquest of Sicily and Italy's unconditional surrender would have been completely offset.

However, though the work of unloading on the southern beaches ceased for one day, withdrawal was never seriously considered. The landing places were still under bombardment, while heavy shell were dropping in the northern anchorage where there were also a few air raids. The *Aurora* and *Penelope* reached this area at 8 a.m. on the 14th as a welcome addition to the bombardment forces. They were soon in action and in the course of the next twelve days these two veteran ships of the Mediterranean were each to fire more than 1,000 rounds of 6-inch shell at enemy batteries and strong points, with concentrations of troops and transport, some of them in indirect bombardment at ranges of more than ten miles.

On the evening of the 14th, Sir Andrew Cunningham signalled to Vice-Admiral Hewitt, U.S.N., the Naval Commander of the beaches: "Call on me for all assistance you want and I will try and help you all I can. *Valiant* and *Warspite* on their way to join you. *Nelson* and *Rodney* also available for your use."

The island of Capri was occupied without incident on September 14th, and the islands of Ischia, Procida, Ventotene and Ponza the next day. Rear-Admiral J. A. V. Morse, Flag Officer designate, Western Italy, took over Capri on the part of the Allies, and established a temporary base for light coastal craft, besides placing the defences under Allied control. The island had remained practically untouched by the war, and Count Ciano's luxurious villa, with its fine cellar and furniture, pictures and fittings, was used as an officers' mess and headquarters. It was sumptuous in the extreme, with electricity harnessed for each and every domestic need. A row of coloured push-buttons beside the large ornate bed with silken sheets once occupied by Mussolini's daughter, the Countess, caused



the various sections of shutters over the huge windows overlooking the sea to close or open at will.

On September 15th the German attack near the Sele River had penetrated to within a 1,000 yards of the shore. Every available ship was bombarding, the American cruiser *Boise*, for instance, firing 563 rounds of 6-inch shell alone against enemy troops and tanks some distance inland, and the destroyer *Mayo* 1,160 rounds of 5-inch. On this day the *Valiant* and *Warspite*, under the orders of Captain L. H. Ashmore of the *Valiant*, reached the southern anchorage to reinforce the bombarding squadrons. They were accompanied by the destroyers *Jervis*, *Ilex*, *Petard*, *Pathfinder*, *Panther* and *Penn*.

On the 15th, firing at very long range, nineteen of the thirty rounds of 15-inch fired by the *Warspite* (Captain H. A. Packer), fell exactly on the targets, while on the 16th sixteen of her thirty-two shell were dead on the target and eight within 100 yards. Enemy traffic concentrations were pounded and ammunition dumps blown up, and much the same result was achieved when the *Valiant*, firing from the northern area, bombarded the town and important road junction at Nocera. Crammed with enemy troops and transport, Nocera was out of sight behind the hills some eight miles in a direct line north-west of Salerno, on the road to Naples.

The battleships bombarded at ranges of between 19,500 and 21,800 yards, and the effect of their fire can be judged from the reports of the forward observation officers: "Nine exact hits. Ridge smothered." "Ten hits and position demolished." "All hits in town area. Ammunition dump blown up." Though the hard-pressed troops could not see the results of their shooting, there can be no doubt that the psychological effect of seeing the *Valiant* and *Warspite* bombarding from close inshore also played a very large part in relieving a situation which at one time showed every indication of becoming extremely grave.

The air raids on both anchorages continued, and here, to change the subject, is the story of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary *Derwentdale* (Captain M. Humphery, Master). Working with

the Southern Attack Force, she carried fuel, which from time to time she supplied to American and British destroyers, and the L.S.Ts. *Boxer* and *Bruiser*. She also fuelled and serviced fourteen small naval landing craft of her own flotilla and twenty-one belonging to the *Empire Charmian*, besides lodging and victualling seven officers and 105 men of that latter ship when she was sunk.

During the period September 9th-15th the *Derwentdale* was subjected to nineteen dive-bombing attacks, which were no novelty. At a quarter past noon on the 15th, however, seven dive-bombers attacked out of the sun, two bombs falling close to the stem, three close amidships on the starboard side, while two more hit the shell plating of the engine-room on the port side, striking at an acute angle and blowing a large hole. The engine-room flooded at once and the ship started to sink by the stern. Captain Humphery slipped his cable, and, with the assistance of the tug *Hengist*, the ship was towed into shallow water and beached. The transfer of fuel from aft to forward was begun as soon as a steam hose could be connected from the *Hengist* to the *Derwentdale's* cargo pumps, and at 5.30 p.m. the ship started off for Malta in tow.

The point of the story is not so much the damage to the ship as the fine behaviour of her men. "The conduct of the whole crew during this trying period was excellent," Captain Humphery wrote. "The gunners only left their guns for a few minutes at a time, and their accurate fire caused bombers to swerve and miss the ship with their bombs on several occasions. The bomber that hit us on the 15th was shot down by one of the forward pompoms." In mentioning the names of some of his officers and men, Captain Humphery drew particular attention to Sergeant Albert H. Hinton, a pensioner of the Royal Marines, who "showed courage of a very high order. He stood in an exposed position directing the fire of the after guns in the face of repeated dive-bombing attacks. It was largely due to his skilful direction and the example he set that the ship survived six days and nights of bombing before she was eventually hit and put out of action."

## IV

On September 15th, 16th and 17th the naval bombardment had redoubled in its fury, while all the available aircraft of the Mediterranean Air Force were switched on to the intensive bombing of the German concentrations. Accurate naval gun fire sealed off the German thrust from reinforcement, and converted the spearhead of their attack into an immobile huddle of men, guns, tanks and vehicles for constant heavy strikes by Allied bombers. For nearly seventy-two hours the enemy was mercilessly pounded with a weight of metal and explosive which was then without precedent for any similar area.

By the 16th the military situation was less tense, and the link-up of the Fifth and Eighth Army patrols was imminent. The *Valiant* and *Warspite* were no longer required, and they had been ordered to sail for Augusta on completion of that day's bombarding.

Meanwhile, the enemy had still been using his radio-controlled bombs for attacks upon the ships bombarding and in the anchorages. At 7.40 a.m. on the 16th an American L.C.T. alongside the *James Marshall* was hit and sunk, the latter vessel being set ablaze, though the fire was soon extinguished by salvage tugs. In the northern area the destroyer *Lookout* was near-missed by a radio-controlled bomb at 2.40 p.m.

At about the same time, in the southern area, the *Warspite* had just completed her third successful bombardment of the day, when she and other vessels were bombed by ten to twelve aircraft, which was nothing unusual. This was at once followed by an attack by radio-controlled bombs released from a few parent aircraft flying at 20,000 feet. Looking like white mushrooms moving head first, they were seen coming in from the port beam at heights of 6,000-8,000 feet. When nearly overhead they dived and came down at terrific speed. One landed and exploded just clear, and a second hit the water about six feet from the *Warspite's* starboard bulge. The other, the earliest to arrive, came straight down to the middle of the

ship and burst below, inflicting very severe damage and causing many casualties.

In spite of her injuries, many of the *Warspite's* anti-aircraft guns continued to engage the hostile aircraft. But the old ship was in a bad way. Four boiler-rooms had flooded almost immediately, and a fifth soon followed. She could still steam at slow speed; but at 3 p.m. the last boiler filled with sea water and all steam failed. As Captain Packer wrote in his report: "The situation was unattractive." The *Warspite* was gravely damaged. Some 5,000 tons of water had increased her normal draught by nearly 5 feet. "She was only a few miles from Salerno and liable to air attack at any moment; radar was out of action; it was known that there were submarines in the area and only four destroyers were in company."

The grand old ship was taken in tow by the United States tugs *Hopi* and *Moreno*, which managed to get her moving ahead at four knots, while the *Delhi* joined company for anti-aircraft protection. The cruisers *Euryalus* and *Scylla*, with another destroyer, arrived for additional escort. Two tugs, the *Nimble* and *Oriana*, arrived the next day, September 17th, with the salvage vessel *Salveda*. By 11.30 p.m. that night, as they were approaching the Straits of Messina, they were joined by the American tug *Narragansett* from Malta.

The *Warspite's* passage through the narrow straits, with its strong current, was hair-raising. The tugs were unable to hold her great weight, and most of this part of the passage was made "crab fashion." She safely reached Malta for docking at 8 a.m. on September 19th, and on November 1st sailed for Gibraltar in tow of four tugs and screened by destroyers, arriving seven days later.

The *Warspite's* severe damage at Salerno was a sad ending to her fine record in the Mediterranean, and before she finally sailed for Malta Admiral Hewitt signalled that he deeply regretted her casualties and damage. He was grateful for her efficient support, which had so aided the forces on shore. He wished her the best of luck.

Few ships of the Royal Navy have had a worthier fighting

record than the *Warspite*, which started with Jutland on May 31st, 1916, where she was in hot action with German battleships and badly hit. She was flagship in the Mediterranean in 1939, and when the war began one of her earliest tasks was to proceed at high speed to Halifax and to escort the first contingent of Canadian troops to Britain, the enemy battleship *Deutschland* at that time being at large in the Atlantic. She was in action at Narvik in April, 1940; but the next month returned to the Mediterranean as Sir Andrew Cunningham's flagship, where in July she was in action with the fleeing Italian battle fleet off Calabria, and hit the *Giulio Cesare* amidships with a 15-inch shell at 26,000 yards, which put that battleship out of action for a considerable period. There followed many bombardments along the Libyan coast and another of Valona, and then, on the night of March 27th-28th, 1941, the Battle of Matapan, when the *Warspite*, *Barham* and *Valiant*, with their destroyers, blasted three Italian cruisers into blazing shambles at point-blank range.

The *Warspite* was engaged in the Battle for Crete in May, 1941, where she was heavily bombed and damaged. She left Alexandria and passed through the Suez Canal, Red Sea and Indian Ocean and was later heard of at Singapore, Manila and Pearl Harbour, finally to arrive at Bremerton Navy Yard, near Seattle, for repairs after a voyage of 14,000 miles. This was before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, on December 7th, 1941. Her damage made good, the battleship crossed the Pacific to Sydney, and then on through the Indian Ocean to Trincomalee, where during 1942 she was flagship of Admiral Sir James Somerville, Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, for the war against Japan. Recalled to the Mediterranean, she was back there in time, as has been seen, for the invasion of Sicily in July, 1943.

Repaired at Gibraltar after her severe damage at Salerno, the *Warspite* was completed in time to play a conspicuous part in bombarding during the Normandy invasion in June, 1944; but on the 13th of that month, while on passage from Portsmouth to Rosyth, was again damaged by a mine. She reached

Rosyth under her own steam and was repaired, and in August was again in action against Brest, and in September at Le Havre. The last time she was engaged was on November 1st against the German batteries and defences on Walcheren Island.

In her thirty years of existence many thousands of officers and men served in this fine ship to which Sir Andrew Cunningham referred as "the old lady." She wore the flags of many distinguished Admirals, and bore the scars of many battles. By the time these words are in print she may have ended her career in the squalid desolation of a shipbreaker's yard, riven and burnt asunder for sale as scrap metal for re-manufacture into a hundred and one implements, tools and utensils. Sailors may perhaps be unduly sentimental about their old ships, and thousands will regret her passing.\*

The name of "Warspite," however, will survive as long as there is a Royal Navy, and the fine fighting record of the seventh ship to hold that name since 1596 can never pass into oblivion.

v

To revert to the operation off Salerno. The *Valiant* sailed for Augusta on the afternoon of September 16th after her successful bombardment of Nocera, and the next morning the cruisers *Sirius* and *Dido* arrived to relieve the *Mauritius* and *Orion* in the northern area, all four ships, with many destroyers, continuing to bombard during the day. At 4.45 p.m., before sailing with the *Mauritius* for a well-earned rest and to replenish ammunition, the *Orion* had a send-off in the shape of a near-miss from a radio-controlled bomb, which did no damage.

The gunfire support of both these departing cruisers, with every salvo pin-pointed by observers ashore, had been extremely accurate and most discomfiting to the enemy. In the eight days since the landing, the *Mauritius* had fired 1,349 rounds of 6-inch shell at German positions and concentrations, and the *Orion* 1,018. The ammunition fired by their lighter

\* This was written before the *Warspite* broke away from her tugs in heavy weather and drove ashore in Mount's Bay.

weapons during the many air raids was incalculable. There had been little or no rest for their ships' companies.

There were more air attacks on the northern anchorage on the 17th, with one consignment of bombs near the *Hilary*, on board of which the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham, arriving in H.M.S. *Offa* with Vice-Admiral Hewitt, visited Commodore Oliver for consultation in the course of the forenoon. Though the beaches were still under enemy fire, the military situation had greatly changed for the better. Reinforcements had arrived, and the timely application of sea and air power, in the shape of concentrated naval gunfire and intensive bombing, had broken the German thrust towards the coast and had forced the surviving enemy troops to withdraw to escape annihilation. After a most difficult advance from the south over execrable mountain roads with many blown bridges, hampered also by lack of fuel, elements of General Montgomery's Eighth Army had made contact with American patrols of the Fifth Army on the 16th, on which date the enemy began a gradual withdrawal. By the 18th the movement had developed into a definite retirement, with some enemy columns moving northward towards Avellino, and others along the direct road to Naples.

The Allied beach-head was secure, though for another four days the beaches and northern anchorage continued to be shelled on a gradually decreasing scale. To this the Navy retaliated with constant bombardments of the German batteries and retiring columns crowding every available road. The Allied Army, meanwhile, had been able to regroup in favourable terrain, and at 3.30 a.m., preceded by an intense artillery bombardment supplemented by the fire of three cruisers shooting at long range over the hills, the successful offensive began. There was more heavy fighting in the passes and defiles before the Plain of Naples was reached and the city occupied. Because of the lack of level ground near Salerno, it was impossible to deploy all the land artillery, and here it was that the naval supporting fire was again of the greatest value in saving time and many lives as the offensive developed.

Of all the ships that were in action during this period no precise record is available to me; but between September 17th and 25th the *Sirius* fired more than 1,100 rounds of 5.25-inch shell at enemy targets north of Salerno, and the *Dido* something over 1,800. Troop concentrations, motor transport, roads and gun positions were all well plastered. In all, up to September 26th, the British and American Navies expended 2,227,334 lb. of shell in providing gunfire support for the Army, while by the 28th it was officially estimated that they had fired the equivalent of 71,500 field artillery shell at more than 556 shore targets.

The Germans themselves attributed the final Allied success at Salerno to the overwhelming effect of the naval bombardment from the sea.

## VI

Little remains to be said of the work of the Navies in the Gulf of Salerno.

On September 24th, for the first time since the landing, there was no enemy shelling of the beaches or port of Salerno, which was re-entered by the port party next morning with two coasters, a tug and a boom defence vessel. Montecorvino airfield was finally out of range of enemy artillery and fully operational by September 26th.

Now, after eighteen days of perfect weather, with calm sea and hardly a ruffle of breeze, the wind and swell started to rise. It blew still harder on the 27th, so that minesweeping in the Bay of Naples had to be cancelled and some of the beaches near Salerno closed down. The weather moderated slightly in the afternoon, and on the 28th unloading was going well and more ships were being taken into the port of Salerno. Castellamare, on the south side of the Bay of Naples, was clear of the enemy, and a naval port party was moving in by road for the purpose of establishing a landing-craft base in the Italian naval dockyard.

A full gale which started on the evening of the 28th and continued the next day drove several landing craft ashore on



the northern beaches and prevented unloading; but the weather had moderated by the 30th and the indefatigable minesweepers were again hard at work clearing channels through the mine-fields off Naples, an arduous and exacting task.

Kesselring had started his evacuation of the city and surrounding towns on the 27th, and at daylight on October 2nd advanced troops of the Allied Army were in Naples. Escorted by light coastal craft of the British and American Navies, Rear-Admiral Morse, the Flag Officer, Western Italy, disembarked at Naples at 11 a.m. Commodore Oliver arrived there in the *Hilary* next day, to note that the city was still under spasmodic shell fire at 5.30 p.m.

The naval port party for Naples disembarked there on October 4th, and on the 5th all the northern beaches in the Gulf of Salerno were closed down, and what unloading was necessary there was transferred to Salerno Harbour. By the superhuman efforts of all concerned Naples was already starting to function as a port, and the operation known as "Avalanche" had ceased. This ended the Navy's share in a great combined undertaking which had resulted, as described by Mr. Churchill, as "an important and pregnant victory, one deserving a definite place on the records."

As has been said, it was the most ambitious amphibious operation launched up to that time. The assault came very near to failure, and for a time the situation was precarious indeed. As Sir Andrew Cunningham himself was later to report: "That it succeeded after many vicissitudes reflects great credit on Vice-Admiral Hewitt, U.S.N., his subordinate commanders and all those who served under them. That there were extremely anxious moments cannot be denied. . . . I am proud to say, however, that throughout the operation, the Navies never faltered and carried out their tasks in accordance with the highest traditions of their Services. It was naval gunfire which turned the scales on September 15th when there was danger of the enemy breaking through to the beaches and when the overall position looked so gloomy. More cannot be said."

In the course of the operations about 100 Allied ships and craft were sunk or damaged, of which ten warships, three merchant vessels, about fifteen landing craft and two hospital ships were lost through mine, bomb or torpedo. Considering the risks that necessarily had to be taken and the results achieved, the naval losses cannot be considered excessive.

The courage, good seamanship and devotion to duty on the part of thousands of British and American seamen, most of them young, was beyond all praise. As Commodore Oliver himself was to write: "The assault called for the closest possible co-operation between British and American forces at every stage, sometimes in the face of considerable opposition. Nothing could have been closer. Co-operation was achieved without difficulty and in a fine spirit of comradeship."

This was a splendid augury for the future. American naval methods might differ slightly from the British, though in essentials they were the same. But at Salerno, with Americans commanding British, and British commanding Americans, the two Navies were intermingled. Working in a common task, fighting for a common object, the seamen of both countries strove and suffered side by side through the heat and turmoil of battle with a perfect understanding and a true appreciation of each others' great qualities.

## CHAPTER X

## NAPLES

## I

ON October 2nd, 1943, when the Army had forced the pass north of Salerno after prolonged and bitter fighting to sweep through into the Plain of Naples and past Pompeii and Vesuvius into the city itself, a small naval advance party under Lieutenant-Commander A. T. Douglas, R.N.R., entered Naples by road. The Flag Officer, Western Italy, as already mentioned, arrived the same day by sea.

Naples had once been a busy and progressive port, with miles of wharves and jetties and every sort of equipment for handling huge quantities of cargo. It had warehouses and repair shops, dry docks and fuelling plants, and abounded with tugs, lighters, barges, floating cranes and small tankers; indeed, all the miscellaneous small craft found in any first-class commercial port.

But Naples was now a shambles of wreckage and destruction. Because the port had largely been used for the supply of Rommel's army in Libya, it had been heavily and systematically bombed by Allied aircraft. What remained had been blocked, sabotaged and demolished by the retreating Germans with all their customary ingenuity and skill. They had had about three weeks in which to do their worst. Just before the Allied occupation, photographic reconnaissance showed more than thirty major wrecks in Naples Harbour alone. Just how many more were invisible from the air was a matter for conjecture. The satellite ports of Castellamare, Torre Annunziata, Bagnoli, Pozzuoli and Baia had been treated in much the same fashion, while the great Ansaldo armament works, covering acres of ground near Bagnoli, had been laid in utter ruin.

October 2nd, when the first Allied parties entered Naples, was cold with heavy driving rain. The port presented a thoroughly depressing picture. Not one ship remained afloat. Practically the whole of the water area was covered with the thick, iridescent scum of oil fuel littered with masses of floating wreckage, out of which appeared the leaning masts, funnels and upperworks of sunken ships and the bilges of others that had capsized. The buildings on the quays and jetties had been blasted into masses of broken ferro-concrete, masonry and brickwork, intermingled with twisted girders and steelwork. Fires still smouldered among the ruins, and every roadway was choked with rubble. Every berth was foul—some with sunken and capsized ships, others with the debris of buildings or the remains of the dockside cranes blown into the water.

Ashore, along the waterfront, the jagged, tottering walls peered out of the ruin of shattered buildings like blackened, decaying teeth. Not a building in the port area remained whole. It was as though the place had been swept by a cataclysm. The power stations had been wrecked by the enemy. The city was without electric light or water, and there was very little food. The frightened, grey-faced starving inhabitants crept in and out of the ruins like troglodytes. Typhus and other diseases were raging. The sanitary conditions were indescribable.

Apart from the berths for ships and the clear spaces for handling cargo, all the exits for carrying the goods away seemed hopelessly blocked with rubble. There were mines and booby traps, some of which were to explode weeks later. Those who were to be responsible for converting Naples into a port for landing reinforcements and thousands of tons of guns, ammunition, tanks, vehicles, fuel and miscellaneous cargo for the supply of the Army, gazed at the scene in stupefaction. Sabotage by the retreating enemy was all very well; but those who had to reopen the port did not share in any feelings of triumph at the extra devastation caused by the Allied air raids.

As one of the first measures, a Hydrographic Survey Unit, under Lieutenant W. Ashton, R.N., had the task of surveying

and sweeping the approaches and berthing spaces to discover how each and every one was blocked. The floor of the port was tested out with sextant and sounding line, after which it was swept and proved for mines until there was a clear channel down which a ship was brought gingerly in to lie alongside half a shattered jetty. This naval hydrographic work was no new departure. Mediterranean Survey Units had followed close on the heels of the Eighth, First and Fifth Armies during their operations, and had already surveyed all the North African ports between Alexandria and Algiers, ports on the east coast of Sicily, and others in Italy. Their work was to continue until the end of the war as each and every port was occupied.

The salvage force for clearing the water area of wrecks and obstructions was half British and half American. Commodore W. A. Sullivan of the United States Navy was the Chief Salvage Officer, with Captain W. A. Doust, R.N.V.R., as his deputy. As the latter wrote: "With the bewildering chaos one encountered the day we entered Naples, it was difficult at once to assess the salvage task involved. . . . However, we spent a useful day inspecting the port from end to end, dodging demolition squads, bulldozers and a hive of workers who were endeavouring to get the quay spaces cleared." That first day, however, it was decided that the salvage operations should be undertaken on a fifty-fifty basis, the Royal Navy taking the western end of the port and the United States Navy the eastern part. Equipment, craft and labour would be pooled as the need arose.

The equally difficult task of clearing the quays and road exits on shore was begun under the direction of Colonel (later Brigadier) P. S. Lieper, British Movement and Transportation and Port Commandant. A month later, when the responsibility for the shore end of the port became American, Colonel R. H. Clarkson, who had acted as Colonel Lieper's deputy, became the United States Port Commandant. Clarkson, who was British by birth and had served in our Army during the First World War and earned the Military Cross, was a tower of

strength and a firm friend. Colonel F. E. Martin, U.S. Army Engineers, was Chief Engineer.

The stupendous task of clearing the port was another classic example of successful team-work, not merely between British and Americans, Navy and Army, but between the Salvage Force, the Port Constructors Corps and the Port Engineers. The greater portion of the magnificent equipment used for clearing the quays and exits was American, but the real success lay in what someone referred to as "the harmonious and co-ordinated association of all concerned. The teams of officers know their jobs and knew each other."

It was shortly before noon on October 3rd that the first Allied vessels reached Naples—minesweepers, boom defence vessels, salvage ships, tugs, patrol craft and the like—"An army of ants to eat their way into the wreckage," as Admiral Morse expressed it.

As in every other occupied port, the functions of the Navy were manifold. Before even the salvage gear or any vehicles could be put ashore, let alone troops with all their supplies and equipment, the outer and inner channels leading to the port had to be searched and swept clear of mines by fleet and other minesweepers, and regular minesweeping organized in the approaches as a matter of daily routine. A pilotage service had to be established, and harbour tugs provided, manned and operated. A full communication system, by radio, telephone and visual signalling had to be set up, and undamaged or partially damaged buildings ashore requisitioned for officers and the accommodation of naval personnel. Naples was still liable to attack by submarines, E-boats and aircraft, with the chance of enemy minelaying in the approaches. Among other naval responsibilities were the general security of all ships and craft using the port; the organization and operation of seaward defences, including the provision of outer and inner patrols and the laying and manning of anti-submarine and other defences; and defence against seaborne attack in conjunction with the Army. Detailed arrangements had also to be made for the berthing, repair, fuelling and

supply of warships and merchantmen of all types, while intricate work was entailed in the acceptance of convoys and their escorts, and the issue of the necessary orders and instructions. All these were among the onerous duties of the Naval Officer in Charge, an appointment assumed by Captain R. E. F. McQ. Mackenzie, R.N., at Naples on October 8th. Much had to be done in a very short time before cargoes could be brought ashore in quantity for the supply of the Army.

## II

The problem of salvage presented many difficulties. The wrecking of nearly 200 vessels, large and small, including destroyers, tankers, tugs, sloops, corvettes, trawlers, floating cranes, tank barges and merchant ships, had been supervised by men with an expert knowledge of salvage. Each vessel had had her internal bulkheads destroyed, after which she was so badly blown as to prevent any use of pumps or compressed air by the salvors. Over each of the larger vessels the Germans had invariably sunk a few lighters, with a dock crane, an occasional locomotive or a string of railway trucks, with wagon-loads of ammunition, oxygen bottles, small arms and machinery, discharged haphazardly over all. This super-tangle of obstructions had been created deliberately to involve the delay of intensive diving operations after the main wreck had been reached. Naples had practically no rise and fall in the tide, and with the depth of water alongside a quay little more than the loaded draft of an average cargo ship, even a railway truck could prevent a vessel from berthing alongside.

As has been said, the whole water area of the port was covered with oil fuel and wreckage. Until it was eventually dispersed, it presented a constant menace. Naples was within easy reach of the *Luftwaffe*, and a determined attack with incendiary bombs might have set the port ablaze. The thick scum of oil greatly hindered the divers. In the earlier stages they emerged from the water literally covered with slime and suffered intense discomfort. The oil also rotted the diving

dressess. The expedient was later adopted of lowering an air jet to the sea bottom, and the rising and spreading bubbles produced a patch of clear water 6 to 10 feet in diameter.

Because the rise and fall in the tide was negligible, and the maximum depth alongside the quays was little more than the draft of the ships which would use them, it was clear from the start that the removal of wrecks by demolition would only increase the diving and lifting work. It was therefore decided that each and every wreck must be lifted as whole as possible.

To quote Captain Doust again: "We knew that we might lack lifting appliances; but events proved how many types of craft could effectively be used to make up this deficiency. . . . While the captured Italian lifting 'camels' were being brought forward from Sicily, every vessel capable of taking a heavy lift was brought into service."

The *Empire Dace* (Captain P. Richards, Master), *Empire Candida* (Captain J. D. Hughes, Master) and *Empire Valour* (Captain R. J. McNinch, Master) were assigned such work as lay within their lifting power. However, the handy little boom defence vessels, H.M.S. *Barmond* (Lieutenant L. J. Essery, R.N.R.), *Barndale* (Lieutenant R. L. Jones, R.N.R.), *Barhill* (Lieutenant V. R. Christmas, R.N.R.), *Barflake* (Lieutenant Peters, R.N.R.) and *Barholm* (Skipper-Lieutenant T. Buxton, R.N.R.), probably pulled more weight in the clearing of Naples and its satellite ports than any other vessels. The activities of the salvage vessel *King Salvor*, though she was capable of the heaviest lift, were rather restricted because of her length. The wreck-dispersal vessel *Dispenser* (Captain Hunter, Master), was assigned those lifts beyond the capacity of the boom defence vessels. Pressed into service, too, was H.M.S. *Hi-Baller*, a small 10-ton sheer-legs acquired at Castellamare, and the 70-ton sheer-legs *Titano*, captured at Ischia. The *Titano* averaged a lift of more than 100 tons every two days after her arrival.

Among the American vessels used for salvage work at Naples were U.S.S. *Weight* (Lieutenant Leamond, U.S.N.R.), *Brant* (Lieutenant Tornberg, U.S.N.R.), *Moreno* (Lieutenant



Kylberg, U.S.N.R.) and *Tackle* (Lieutenant Gillespie, U.S.N.R.).

Much had to be improvised, and there was often a heavy strain on the lifting appliances, particularly when the same equipment was needed simultaneously at both ends of the port. However, by careful planning, the sequence of the lifting work was so managed that all the equipment was working to full capacity in one sector, while the divers were preparing the lifting wires on the wrecks in the other. The *Hi-Baller*, the 10-ton sheer-legs, was rarely seen without 20 tons of wreck hanging from her "A" frame, or the *Titano*, whose boiler leaked like a basket, being towed to the "graveyard" with her fore-end awash with 120 tons of sailing ship.

"We had no blue prints and no plans," wrote Captain Doust. "If the two 'Bars' already hooked up to a brig or corvette weren't men enough for the job, we would just add another 'Bar' or perhaps the old *Titano*. Reasonable risks had to be taken; but, in spite of the abuse to which the sturdy little boom defence vessels were subjected, they suffered little more than an occasional scored 'bullnose.' "

As regards labour, five gangs of Italian divers were soon located and working, together with the necessary parties of Italian riggers, shipwrights and mechanics. There had to be some weeding out of the unsuitable; but as the more highly skilled men came drifting back to Naples from the suburbs, the crew of salvage workers collected was eventually second to none.

By October 5th, three days after the Allied entry, a useful area of quay space had been opened up for all types of landing craft, while in due course the jetty at the island of Nisida was cleared and transformed into a base for L.S.Ts. Bagnoli also became a fuelling base, and Pozzuoli a base for L.S.Ts. and landing craft, as well as a discharging point for fleet tankers carrying oil fuel. The smaller ports to the southward of Naples—Torre del Greco, Torre Annunziata, and Castellamare—were all opened up for shipping in turn and helped to relieve the pressure on Naples itself. In each of these satellite ports

ships had been sunk in the berthing spaces, and piers, quays, cranes, buildings and machinery wrecked.

By October 15th, in Naples alone, seventeen vessels had been lifted and dumped in the "graveyard" from the British area, and another eight from the American sector. In one berth the heavy counterweight, cab and turntable of the sunken floating crane were lifted by the *Titano*. More trouble and diving time had to be spent on this crane than on any other wreck in the port, the Germans having partially cut through the superstructure before exploding the demolition charges. As this meant that the lifting slings constantly pulled through the debris the wearisome task provided headaches for many people.

Of the seventy-three quayside cranes with which Naples had originally been provided, only one remained standing when the salvors arrived, and that one was damaged. All the others had been systematically sabotaged, and then blown with the adjacent quay into the water. Every piece of the resulting wreckage had to be removed before a berth could be considered clear.

However, the work progressed rapidly, and by October 27th thirty-seven wrecks had been lifted by the British and twenty-two by the Americans. Many more berths, with the quays and exits, were ready for use, and in the month of October alone 119 merchant ships of 716,450 gross tons entered the port of Naples, where not a berth for shipping was available on October 2nd. In that month 134,938 tons of cargo was discharged in Naples itself, and another 94,113 tons in the satellite ports.

Some of the wrecks were unsalvageable, or else were so badly damaged as to not be worth the time which would be spent in raising them. A number of them were therefore cut down and bridged over by the port constructors, thus providing extra piers for shipping. In this manner Naples was eventually provided with *more* berthing accommodation than in peacetime, fourteen additional billets being improvised. It was a strange sight to see troops being disembarked over wooden

platforms built over the hull of a sunken Italian cruiser lying on her beam ends, or trucks and lorries rumbling on to a broad pier constructed over the deck of a sunken tanker after the removal of her upperworks.

To give full details of all the salvage work at Naples, not to mention the clearance at Castellamare, Torre Annunziata, Torre del Greco, Nisida, Bagnoli, Pozzuoli and Baia, would be wearisome. But by the middle of March, 1944, sometimes impeded by bad weather and a heavy swell, with occasional air raids, the British and American salvage teams together had removed 170 wrecked vessels, together with a great mass of miscellaneous wreckage and debris. Many additional jobs came their way, including the salvage and repair of a large floating dock, the clearance of wrecks from three dry docks, the clearing of fouled propellers, assistance to bombed and damaged vessels, the salvage of ships driven ashore in bad weather, and the recovery of a locomotive, a steam roller and a 40-ton tractor which had subsided into the water on the collapse of a jetty. When the leaking boiler of the sheer-legs *Titano* finally gave out, a new portable boiler from the *King Salvor*, which had been assembled in readiness, was taken by the *Hi-Baller* and seated on board the *Titano* in forty-eight hours.

In January, working under fire, the *Barmond* and *Barndale* dealt with five wrecks at Anzio in thirty-six hours, while at Bastia, in the north of Corsica, the *Dispenser* and *Barholm* cleared the harbour of seven wrecks in eight days. While all this miscellaneous work was in progress, other salvage parties were sent to deal with wrecks at Bari and Palermo. The main lesson learnt in all these operations was that the "Bar" or boom defence vessels, properly rigged and equipped, were among the hardiest vessels afloat for rapidly clearing a port. Their existence was more than amply justified.

While all this salvage was in progress, the Port Construction and Engineers Corps under Colonel F. E. Martin, U.S. Army Engineers, and consisting almost entirely of American Army personnel and locally recruited Italian labour, had removed some millions of tons of debris from the quays and exits with

their grabs, bulldozers and explosives. Like the salvage, it was a gigantic task successfully accomplished.

In January, 1944, a mere three months after the Allied occupation, the shattered port of Naples alone was handling an average of more than 10,000 long tons of miscellaneous Army stores each day. In that month, indeed, Naples and its satellites handled more cargo—495,695 long tons—than even New York, and had become the greatest port in the world. By February it had broken its own record by nearly 90,000 tons, and by March had done it again with 731,889 long tons of general cargo discharged and loaded. Figures convey little to the imagination; but the work done at Naples was a record which redounds to the credit of Admiral Morse and all those who co-operated with him. Naples was one of the Navy's priority tasks which helped to ensure the final success of the Army in Italy.

## III

In normal times electric power for the city of Naples was obtained from hydro-electric plants in Southern Italy over a large-scale "grid" system. However, large sections of the transmission lines had been destroyed by the retreating Germans. There were two thermal generating stations near the city at Volturmo and Capuano, ordinarily only used in emergencies. The Volturmo Diesel plant had been rendered inoperative about six months before and no efforts made to repair it, while the steam plant at Capuano had been demolished by the enemy. Great damage had also been done to the cable distribution systems in the city, and to many of the sub-stations. Similar conditions prevailed as regards the water supplies, primarily through the demolition of the main aqueducts. To check the spread of disease, the supply of running water was a prime necessity.

On October 7th, at the request of Admiral Morse, four Italian submarines arrived in Naples to supply electric power. However, all the shore requirements for power, other than electric lighting, involved the use of alternating current,

whereas only direct current could be provided by the submarines. By skilful improvisation, this difficulty was overcome, and on October 16th the pumping plant was started for the first time by the Royal Navy.

It also became the duty of the Royal Navy and the Royal Marine Engineers to repair the two generating plants at Volturmo and Capuano, the work being carried out under the direction of Electrical Commander G. E. Hoggan, R.N., assisted by Major J. E. Mahoney of the R.M.E.\* Day and night shifts were started at Volturmo on October 5th, Italian labour was recruited to assist, and, in spite of the wreckage and the difficulty of procuring spare parts and material for repairs, the first machine was started up on October 22nd, and was in regular service with a restricted output within three days, when the submarines were relegated to stand-by duty. The Italian permanent staff of the station were so carried away by the excitement of seeing their plant running again after six months' stoppage that they produced and presented an address of considerable length and extreme verbosity. Composed almost entirely of superlatives, it hailed the British and the British Navy as their saviours.

Unfortunately, on Guy Fawkes Day, as the result of an enemy air attack, all the new walls near the newly-running generator were blown in, and the new roof collapsed on to the machine which was running at the time. To add to the confusion, the weather broke before the debris could be cleared. Torrential rain drove through the station in sheets, causing minor flooding and threatening to soak the generator. First aid had to be applied in the form of tarpaulin shelters; but within two days the plant was again in operation, while the Royal Marine Engineers busied themselves in building a new roof. At the end of December, 1943, Volturmo was handed back to the Italians for routine operation and maintenance.

The destruction at Capuano was far more extensive. The main switch-house and control-room were destroyed, while there was serious damage to two turbines and three condensers.

\* Royal Marine Engineers

One boiler had been wholly demolished, and the remaining five badly damaged. The building itself was partially shattered. However, by unremitting labour and not a little improvisation, the first turbo-generator with the necessary boiler plant and high voltage switchgear installations were completed and started up on February 12th, 1944. Two months later three boilers were in service, another was completed and about to be used, and work on the fifth unit was rapidly nearing completion. When one first saw Capuano, it seemed as if those responsible had done the impossible.

## IV

Concurrently with the salvage of wrecks, the restoration of the dry docks, with the ship-repairing and shipbuilding facilities, were pushed on with energy. The work was entirely a Royal Naval commitment, carried out under the direction of Constructor Commander J. A. Mavor, R.C.N.C., Principal Base Constructor Officer, Naples.

The havoc was widespread. All the dry docks were out of action, with the wrecks of several badly damaged ships in them and lying on their sides. The caissons of the three graving docks had been sabotaged, one beyond repair, and the main pumps of two docks totally demolished by explosives. The floating dock had been sunk, and all the repair shops, with the machines and lifting appliances, systematically wrecked or damaged.

Here, too, a miracle was performed. The destroyer dock was pumped out in November and the wreck of an Italian destroyer patched up and removed, the dock coming into operation in twenty-one days. A large cruiser dock was also in operation by December after the ships wrecked in it had been removed, while the debris in the pumping station was cleared and new pumps installed. A caisson for the third graving dock was built at Castellamare Dockyard in the record time of forty-nine days. February, 1944, saw the floating dock raised and semi-permanently repaired, while by March four large cantilever cranes had been rebuilt at Castellamare.

Four German landing craft and four small tankers on the

slips were completed in time to take part in the Anzio operations in January, and a large number of barges were built to speed up the discharge of cargoes in the ports. Slipways for large landing craft were operated day and night, and up till the end of March, 1944, more than 100 ships or large landing craft were docked or slipped for repairs in the Naples area. Later they built tugs and harbour craft; one tug, the *Lady Peggy*, being christened after herself and launched by a Chief Petty Officer Wren who had been one of the first members of the Womens' Royal Naval Service to arrive in the Naples area.

## v

The rehabilitation of a port, though largely naval, is never the sole responsibility of any one service. At Naples, as has been shown, it was the work of British and Americans, of the Navy and Army, and of what local labour could be recruited. The setbacks were many, and the task was unspectacular and difficult. In a matter of weeks, those responsible had to make good the damage of months inflicted upon a port which had grown and developed for more than a century. Much had to be organized and improvised, and the results were taken largely as a matter of course. It was only when things went wrong that people cavilled and complained.

One still treasures recollections of guns and tanks and vehicles being hoisted out of ships and rumbling off on their way to the front; of those huge quantities of shell and explosives on the quaysides; of masses of food and miscellaneous stores and equipment in crates, barrels and packing cases—everything and anything, including harmoniums, cigarettes and chewing gum. One remembers watching the mules belonging to a battalion of fierce-looking Moroccan "Goums" of the French African Army being hoisted out of a ship on to a pier built over the cut-down hull of one of the wrecks. Suspended from derricks, the animals came down three at a time in cargo nets, swinging out in mid-air in the most peculiar of attitudes, sometimes with their forelegs twined affectionately

round each other's necks, to land wild-eyed and startled, but unhurt, on their way to the fighting round Cassino.

And while the mules were doing their circus act, old Vesuvius, one recollects, was erupting mightily in the background, with a huge column of rolling dark smoke and vapour fully 8,000 feet high shot with flashes like lightning, and thick streams of smoking lava flowing down its slopes. The smoke cloud, which constantly changed colour in the sunlight, looked like a gigantic writhing cauliflower.

To get a closer view, three of us went up to the observatory, which stands on a wooded eminence about two-thirds of the way up the western slope of the mountain. Vesuvius was rumbling with a sound like the noise of city traffic magnified a thousandfold, with an occasional deep booming report like the discharge of a 16-inch gun. Through the smoke at the summit one saw huge incandescent masses projected skywards, and little grey smoke trails as they burst in mid-air and descended in white-hot fragments. We were cogitating further ascent for a closer view when a jeep with three South African officers came hurriedly down the winding road above us. We asked them what there was to be seen.

"Don't be damned fools," they said with one voice. "Not more than five minutes ago a red-hot thing the size of a house burst on the hillside within fifty yards of us. We didn't come here to be laid out by Vesuvius."

Nor had we. We thought better of our intention.

From where we stood, and for more than a mile below, streams of molten lava fully 30 feet deep slid imperceptibly and inexorably down the valleys on each side of us. Burning, destroying and burying, they obliterated everything in their path. Villages had to be evacuated, and on the way up we had seen the pitiful little processions of their terror-stricken inhabitants fleeing from the wrath of Nature. Old people with babies in arms, furniture, bedding, crockery, tin pots and pans and tethered fowls were piled insecurely on horse or donkey carts and handcarts. There were laden bicycles, and perambulators sagging under their burdens. Women staggered



under the weight of heavy wardrobes, tables, mirrors and bundles balanced precariously on their heads, while their men, carrying the lighter loads, urged them on. Scores of supercilious-looking goats driven by barefooted small boys added to the confusion. Some of the older people were dazed and speechless, while others wept. All the rest were chattering agitatedly at the tops of their voices. The village priests in full vestments, with their acolytes and the garish images from their churches, prayed and chanted before the encroaching streams of lava—red-hot below and ugly grey above. But inch by inch the smoking flood came on, to engulf and push down houses, and to incinerate and bury the vines and gardens upon which the livelihood of these poor people depended. The pitiful spectacle of the homeless, wailing families evicted from their homes with the accumulated and treasured belongings of generations, reminded one of what was happening all over Europe.

The sight of Vesuvius at night was magnificent and awe-inspiring. High overhead flashes of brilliant violet and green shot through the pall of smoke. Geysers of scarlet and orange flame burst from the summit, with waves of boiling lava overflowing the lip of the crater like red-hot metal from some gigantic cauldron. For two-thirds of the way down towards the sea near Portici and Torre del Greco the valleys and gulleys in the mountainside were traced in broad, zigzag veins of glowing crimson, for all the world like neon signs. Even the calm sea sparkled with patches of ruby light as the volcano flared up.

Vesuvius was vomiting ashes which choked some of the roads for miles around with sharp grit like powdered coke and made them impassable for wheeled traffic. At Bari, 130 miles away as the bird flies, it rained mud.

In Naples we were glad that the breeze was from the westward. Had it blown from the opposite direction, it would have impeded or stopped the work of the port. Vesuvius was probably discharging more tons of material in twenty-four hours than all the ports in the world put together in six months.

## CHAPTER XI

## THE NAVY OFF ITALY

## I

WITH Naples in Allied occupation by October 2nd, the Germans in the west fell back to the Volturno River, to hold a line running east to the central massif of the Apennines, and thence in a northerly direction along the Biferno River to where it flows into the Adriatic near Termoli. But behind this the Germans had been busily constructing two more formidable lines of defence, the first of which, the so-called "Gustav" Line, ran roughly north along the course of the River Garigliano, which enters the Tyrrhenian Sea near Minturno, to Monte Cassino, then across the high, central ridges of the Apennines and down to the mouth of the River Sangro, on the Adriatic shore some twenty miles south-east of Pescara. In the west the "Adolf Hitler" Line ran behind the "Gustav" Line from Formia, across the valley of the River Liri, to a point west of Cassino.

Quite apart from the strength of these defensive positions and the stubborn resistance of the enemy, the mountainous country with its innumerable peaks and razor-backed ridges, its deep valleys and gorges and usually execrable roads, provided a series of natural obstacles which prevented any rapid advance. There were two main roads leading to Rome, that to the north, Route 6 as it came to be called, passing through Cassino and dominated by mountains which were formidable natural anti-tank barriers guarding the entrance to the Liri Valley. That to the south, the old Appian Way, or Route 7, skirted or passed near to the coast between Minturno and Terracina before branching north-west across the reclaimed Pontine Marshes to Rome. Here the flat country could be

flooded by opening the sluices and destroying the pumping stations, which the Germans were not slow in doing.

This narrative does not pretend to deal with purely military operations; but a considerable number of people in England, looking at their maps, seem to have thought that after the successful landing at Salerno and the occupation of Naples, the advance to Rome would follow in the course of a few weeks. Indeed, "Rome by Christmas" became something of a slogan.

Those of us who saw the country over which the Army struggled and fought against a resolute enemy knew otherwise. With the rains of autumn, the snow in winter, and its melting in spring, the rivers became swollen and every stream a torrent. The bridges were destroyed, and had to be reconstructed or by-passed. Valleys and side-roads became sheeted in viscous mud. Even the main roads, heavily mined, became greasy and dangerous for heavy traffic. The steep, inhospitable peaks of the Apennines, thick with snow in the winter, lay always in the background.

It was impossible country, and the campaign in Italy saw some of the fiercest and most difficult fighting of the war.

## II

October, 1943, saw much naval activity in the Western Mediterranean and the Adriatic.

The German troops had evacuated Sardinia and gone to Corsica, which French island had been occupied by the Italians since 1940. It was retaken by French troops from Algiers after a campaign lasting twenty days, the ships taking part including the French cruisers *Montcalm* and *Jeanne D'Arc*, the 'contre-torpilleurs' *Le Fantasque* and *Le Terrible*, the destroyers *L'Alcyon*, *Le Fortuné*, *Basque* and *Tempête*, and the submarines *Casabianca*, *La Perle* and *Aréthuse*.

The re-born French Navy, which at this time consisted of some 157 units large and small, manned by about 53,000 officers and men under the command of Rear-Admiral Lemonnier, was playing an increasing part in the war in the

Mediterranean. Its submarines had been operating with the British for many months, while French convoys along the coasts of North and West Africa had carried 1,000,000 tons of military and civilian supplies since the Allied occupation in November, 1942.

The bulk of the German troops in Corsica escaped to the mainland with their arms to provide a reinforcement for Kesselring; but the capture of the island provided us with an excellent base for light coastal craft at Bastia, which was soon being used to great purpose.

On the night of October 14th-15th British light coastal craft operating in the Piombino Channel between Elba and the mainland sank two enemy supply vessels. Four nights later P.T. boats of the United States Navy operating from Bastia intercepted an escorted northbound enemy convoy near Leghorn and destroyed a heavily-armed F-lighter, while on the night of October 20th-21st, in the same area, they torpedoed another F-lighter in a southbound convoy. Stung to retaliation, German E-boats attacked shipping in the Bay of Naples four nights later, to be engaged and driven off by our patrols before doing any damage, while on the night of the 26th-27th E-boats which appeared off Bastia were beaten off by American P.Ts.

These incidents marked the beginning of an intensive campaign carried out by the Allied light coastal forces against the enemy's coastwise traffic on the west coast of Italy, which was to last until the German surrender eighteen months later. As time went on the enemy's army in Western Italy was to rely more and more upon supplies carried by sea, his convoys moving at night close inshore through waters which were frequently mined and commanded by coastal batteries. The work and successful co-operation of the British M.T.Bs. and M.G.Bs. working together in flotillas with the American P.Ts. was of the highest importance to the campaign as a whole. A few details of some of their many engagements will be given later; but in one period of about ten months Allied coastal forces in Western Italy sank or destroyed seventy-seven

enemy vessels, besides capturing four and damaging many others. At the height of their work, which was to come later, they sank twenty vessels and damaged many others in just over four weeks. This happy result could never have happened without the fullest understanding between British and Americans.

On the west coast of Italy the Fifth Army had driven forward to secure bridgeheads on the Volturno River on October 4th after heavy fighting. The attack across the Volturno was successfully launched eight days later. The destroyers *Laforey* and *Lookout*, with the Dutch gunboat *Flores*, carried out heavy and accurate bombardments while the assault was in progress, and before dawn on October 13th British landing craft and supporting vessels were successful in landing a large body of troops north of the river and behind the enemy's lines. Capua, further inland on the Volturno, had been taken on October 7th, and by the 16th all the German positions on the river had been overrun and the enemy was retiring towards the "Gustav" Line along the Garigliano.

On the east coast of Italy, Brindisi, Bari and many smaller ports were in our hands, while the Adriatic was open for naval operations. By October 4th the Eighth Army had practically reached Termoli, where, on the 6th, the British destroyers *Fervis* and *Offa*, operating on the Army's right flank, were bombarding the railway and gun positions, with concentrations of enemy troops and transport. This fire support from the sea was to continue off and on for months, the Navy covering the sea flank of the Army as it advanced, and the minesweepers clearing channels through the thickly-laid minefields for the safe passage of the regular convoys of landing craft bringing forward the supplies for the troops.

Further afield in the Adriatic, sweeps were soon being carried out by destroyers, with good results. On the night of October 14th-15th the destroyers *Tumult* and *Ilen* intercepted two Italian steamers with German armed guards off the Dalmatian Islands. One, laden with 500 tons of bauxite, was set on fire by her crew and had to be sunk, while the other, a

medium-sized tanker, was captured and brought into harbour. Much the same thing happened on the afternoon of the 16th, when the *Tyrian* and *Tumult* found two other German-manned Italian steamers near the island of Mljet, off the coast of Yugoslavia. One was sunk and the other made a prize. In much the same area the *Tyrian* and *Tumult* sank an ex-Yugoslav trawler manned by Germans on the night of the 21st-22nd, while the night following the *Quilliam* and *Quail* captured another enemy merchantman.

Yugoslavia and the Dalmatian Islands being still in the enemy's hands, there was considerable traffic by sea between the ports and among the islands. Numbers of the local motor-driven schooners, some of them of considerable size, had been seized and armed by the Germans. They were used for sending reinforcements, arms and ammunition, food and clothing to the scattered garrisons, and on their return journeys frequently carried cement for the construction of new fortifications, bauxite for the aluminium plants in the north, or German soldiers going home on leave.

It was necessary to interrupt this traffic, which was of vital importance to the enemy. Destroyers were far too big for work in the narrow channels among the islands with all their shoals and navigational hazards, so the choice naturally fell upon the light coastal craft. The ports on the east coast of Italy were too far away from the intended scene of operations, so after considerable discussion it was finally decided that the island of Vis (Lissa), which had a good harbour, was the most suitable spot for a Coastal Forces base.

Vis had been the scene of Captain Hoste's notable victory over a French squadron in 1811 at a time when the French-controlled Dalmatia was part of Napoleon's "Illyria." With Hvar and Korcula, Vis remained in British possession from 1812 to 1815. Besides some of the old British defence posts, notably Fort George, built in 1813, there is a small English cemetery in Vis in which lie many of those killed in Hoste's action, as well as some officers and men killed in this war.

In October, 1943, however, Vis belonged to Yugoslavia

and was occupied by Marshal Tito's Partisans. Before a Coastal Forces base could be established their goodwill was necessary, so Commander Eric Welman, who was to be in command, was sent over to try out the land. As he says, "An advance party landed at Vis town quay, and there, after some very natural preliminaries, we received an astonishingly cordial reception. It was clear that we could expect enthusiastic co-operation from the local Partisans, and that no time should be lost in starting operations against the enemy on the Dalmatian coast. We laid our plans accordingly. Thereafter began a truly adventurous story of our boats hiding by day in odd caves and rocky inlets, of air attacks missed by hairsbreadths and strikes by night in the inshore island channels with their fearsome navigational dangers, interspersed with almost equally stern struggles with the fierce storms so swift and dangerous in these parts. We began to harass the Hun."

Precisely how the Germans were harassed must be left until later; but in one period of about six weeks British M.G.Bs. and M.T.Bs. in the Adriatic sank thirty enemy craft, damaged several more and took 161 prisoners, against our loss of one man killed, one missing and one wounded, with two craft damaged. Their operations among the islands until the end of the war in Europe contributed in no small measure to the final liberation of Yugoslavia by Marshal Tito's forces.

### III

In the middle of October, 1943, it was announced that the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham, had been recalled to Admiralty as First Sea Lord in succession to Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound, whose illness finally resulted in his death. Admiral Sir John Cunningham, lately Commander-in-Chief, Levant, became Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean.

Sir Andrew's final message to the Mediterranean Fleet has been quoted in full in Chapter I. Two other communications, however, should also be placed on record. The first was to

Vice-Admiral H. Kent Hewitt, Commanding United States Naval Forces, North-west African waters, who was usually known to our Allies by his official American abbreviation of "Comnavnaw" (Commanding Navy, North African Waters). To him the departing Commander-in-Chief wrote:

"MY DEAR HEWITT,—I have already told you with what regret I leave the Mediterranean Station, particularly since it means the breaking of my direct and close relations with the United States Navy, and with you and your officers and men whom it has been my great privilege to command during the last twelve months. Great things have been achieved, and I cannot readily express to you my appreciation, not only of the high standard of courage and enterprise shown by the United States Naval Forces, but of the unquestioning and willing help you have given me at all times. I like to think that we have established in this territory the closest co-operation and real understanding between our two Navies which allows us to work in that conjunction which is so essential to the success of the war. I feel also that this co-operation will prove its value far beyond the Mediterranean and will contribute to the more rapid destruction of the enemy when, as will surely be the case, our two Navies are fighting side by side in Far Eastern waters.

"Goodbye, and again thanks to you one and all.

"Yours very sincerely,

"ANDREW CUNNINGHAM."

To Rear-Admiral Lemonnier, the French Naval Commander-in-Chief, Sir Andrew Cunningham sent the following:

"On relinquishing the command of the Allied Navies in the Mediterranean, I wish to convey to you, Admiral, and to the French Naval Forces, the expression of my sincere goodwill and my wishes for success in the fighting which I am sure lies before us till the Axis naval forces have been destroyed, wherever they may be found. The last twelve months has been a period pregnant in the history of the war



and of the French Navy. You have all, I know, during that time been through moments of great stress and of grievous trouble; despite these obstacles, the French Navy has held its head high and has returned anew to the conflict putting aside past difficulties. As I leave I see the French Navy growing almost daily as ships rejoin, modernized and ready for battle. In the operations for the liberation of Corsica the French Navy carried out its duties with an energy and resolution which speaks well for the future and of which I know you must all be proud."

Seen off by all the more senior officers, Sir Andrew Cunningham left Maison Blanche, near Algiers, early one morning by aeroplane, and reached England the same evening. Admiral Sir John Cunningham reigned in his stead, with his headquarters for the time being at Algiers.

Though Sicily and the southern half of Italy were already in Allied hands, there was still much to be done before the enemy was finally to be driven out of the Mediterranean. The port of Naples had to be rehabilitated and developed as the main supply base for the Fifth and Eighth Armies and the Allied air forces. Similar measures were also needed at Taranto, Brindisi, Bari and smaller Italian ports. Northern Italy had to be occupied, with the ports of Leghorn, Spezia and Genoa in the west, and Venice and Trieste in the east. Elba remained to be captured, and southern France invaded. Yugoslavia, the Dalmatian Islands, Greece and the islands in the Ægean had yet to be liberated. There was still much fighting in prospect, and for another twenty months the Allied Navies were constantly to be in action, besides being busied with their perennial task of supplying the Army. The political situation was also changing rapidly, and though the Navy may not always have been directly implicated in matters of high policy, it was vitally interested in the Mediterranean and the stability of Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece.

With the invasion of Normandy in June, 1944, coinciding as it did with the capture of Rome, the first enemy capital to

fall, the Mediterranean rather faded out of the picture so far as the public in England was concerned. The land fighting in Italy did not move with the rapidity that some people seemed to expect, and with the tremendous and spectacular events which were happening elsewhere, news from the Mediterranean rarely struck the headlines in the attenuated British Press.

Sir John Cunningham's task as Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Navies in the Mediterranean was to be onerous in the extreme. The Navies, as has been said, were in action and movement over a very wide area until the final defeat of Germany. There was sea fighting in plenty by cruisers, destroyers, light coastal and landing craft; but their operations were under the immediate command of his subordinate leaders, and the Commander-in-Chief could only direct from afar. He had none of the satisfaction of leading a fleet into battle. The Navies could always be trusted to do what was required whenever they were called upon, though with a limited number of ships and landing craft, and the many demands and requirements in different areas, the supply of the Army was never easy.

People outside the Navy do not always understand the ways of the sea, or that ships, like those who man them, require periods for recuperation and repair. After a year's hard use, some of the landing craft were beginning to wear out. Repair facilities had largely to be improvised in a series of ex-enemy building yards which had been bombed by the Allies or largely sabotaged by the Germans. Unorthodox methods had to be used to keep craft running, and some of these in bad condition had to be "cannibalized" to make good the defects in others. Moreover, landing craft could not be switched from North Africa to Sicily or Italy, and then to the Adriatic or the Ægean, in the twinkling of an eye.

The work of clearing up the aftermath of enemy occupation and helping to settle the many divergent problems of newly-liberated countries was complicated in the extreme. The Mediterranean theatre was still under a Supreme Allied Commander who was a soldier, and Sir John Cunningham was

the Naval Commander-in-Chief. The Navy was still vitally interested in the Mediterranean as a whole, and there were many important decisions which had to be made on the spot. Fresh problems arose nearly every day.

Sir John Cunningham, as we very soon found, was a man of tireless personal energy and drive who never spared himself. He rarely seemed to relax, and during his many journeys by aeroplane all over the Mediterranean seemed always to be occupied with official business. No man was more lucid in explanation, quicker at digesting a long and important document, or in seeing the weak point in any argument or suggestion. He was sometimes caustic in his remarks.

We had ample evidence of his tirelessness. After July, 1944, when Allied Force Headquarters moved from Algiers to the huge eighteenth-century palace at Caserta, which had been a college for the Italian Air Force before the war, the Commander-in-Chief lived at the Villa Emma at Posillipo, about three miles east of Naples itself. It was specifically allocated to his use by General Eisenhower in order that he might live, as in Algiers, close alongside the villa which the Supreme Allied Commander himself proposed to occupy. With its terrace overlooking the sea and lovely views of the wide sweep of the Bay, with Vesuvius, the mountains of the Sorrento Peninsula and Capri in the background, the Villa Emma had once been the summer residence of Sir William and Lady Hamilton, though it had been considerably altered since their day. Nelson, it is supposed, was a frequent visitor, and one was shown the little boat harbour where he landed.

However, breakfasting alone before 7.30, eight o'clock usually saw Sir John in his office at Navy House on the waterfront at Naples, having already digested all signals or messages that might have arrived during the night, and dealt with those that required immediate attention. By about 8.15 the Admiral was usually to be seen on his way to Caserta.

The distance from Navy House was about twenty miles; first through the city with its paved or cobbled streets crowded with military traffic, trams, laden horse carts and pedestrians,

who went their own sweet ways regardless of gesticulating Italian policemen or any coherent rule of the road, then up the hill to squalid Capodichino with its cemetery and airfield, and on through Casoria, Cardito and Caivano. Once clear of the towns, the road ran through stretches of green agricultural country with its vineyards, hemp and fruit trees, and the mountains in the background. The highway itself was always congested with heavy Army vehicles and jeeps driven by the wildest of drivers, together with farm carts and ancient Italian motor-cars filled to bursting with men, women and children, with all their household belongings and rattling pots and pans lashed on wherever room could be found for them. In places the road was wrongly cambered. It had sudden twists and blind corners, with a surface that was vilely slippery and dangerous in wet weather. Crashes were frequent, and more often than not one saw trucks ditched by the wayside.

Usually by nine o'clock the Commander-in-Chief appeared in the Naval War Room at Caserta to examine the huge wall chart showing the positions and movements of all shipping, to reply to operational signals that needed attention, and to discuss movements or future operations with his staff, in preparation for the Supreme Allied Commander's daily conference at 10.30. Then to his office, to deal with a hundred and one matters of routine, and for further discussions with a never-ending stream of official visitors and callers. As often as not a busy morning was followed by further conferences in the afternoon. Occasionally he might return to the Villa Emma for lunch, after which he might rest a little. But invariably there was more work in the afternoons, and it was not until fairly late in the evening that the C.-in-C. finally returned to the Villa Emma for dinner, which as often as not included official guests. V.I.Ps., or "Very Important Personages," were constantly arriving by air.

Sir John Cunningham's task in the Mediterranean must often have been thankless and uncongenial. In the Allied relations with France, Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece there were many matters of semi-political importance in which the Navy

was vitally interested. The situation was constantly changing, and decisions had to be made on the spot. The Admiral was beset by problems which fall to the lot of few naval Commanders-in-Chief.

The British and American Navies had always worked in the closest harmony and co-operation, and Admiral Hewitt, U.S.N., and the members of his staff at Allied Force Headquarters were on terms of personal friendship with their British opposite numbers. The collaboration was perfect. They worked as one. In October, 1943, however, General De Gaulle was leader of the French in North Africa. The French Navy, rearmed, re-equipped and supplied by the Allies, was rapidly coming into its own. At first there was a tendency for the French to regard it not so much as part of the Allied naval team in the Mediterranean, as a purely French concern for which they were responsible. In the circumstances this perhaps was natural; but forbearance and conciliation had to be used to bring about the complete co-operation under a unified command which was vital to success. The liberation of metropolitan France was one of the objects for which the Anglo-American forces were already working together.

Italy presented a different problem altogether, a defeated ex-enemy who was now a co-belligerent. Though a small section of the Italian Navy was still fighting with the Nazis, Italian cruisers, destroyers and other small craft were soon to be used for escort and other duties in the Allied cause. Few Englishmen, certainly no Frenchmen, could forget that Fascist Italy had come into the war in 1940 when she thought Britain and France were down and out. Anxious to be considered as full Allies, the weak caretaker Government in Rome in 1944 was not hesitant in voicing requests which were wholly incompatible with Allied policy. At the same time, sections of the voluminous Italian Press, which could only be censored for security, lost no opportunity of spreading dissension by vilifying and denouncing their political opponents in power as pro-Fascists. Italy was divided against itself. As was natural, there was no national feeling, no cohesion. The

great bulk of the people, sick of war, were apathetic and bewildered. Corruption, speculation and irresponsibility were rampant. A large-scale black market flourished exceedingly. In so far as the Italian Army was concerned, supervision was so lax that it had long been the custom for some N.C.Os. to take their "rake-off" of the food supplied to the rank and file, which was sold to the local inhabitants at a profit, and for some of the officers to exact their tribute from the N.C.Os.

The Italian Navy had some fine ships. In the words of a British Admiral, who knew it well, "It did some useful jobs, and some very gallant ones. It did its best to help, and its morale and discipline, however poorly we may rate it in comparison with our own, were far and away superior to any other Italian organization, and was the only stabilizing force in the country."

As regards Yugoslavia, our light coastal forces started to operate from Vis among the Dalmatian Islands and off the coast of Yugoslavia in October, 1943. As time wore on, at least a portion of the Yugoslav population who saw their work must have come to realize the part played by the ships and craft of the Royal Navy in the expulsion of the Germans and the final liberation of their country; anyway, one hopes so. The Navy was not primarily interested in the political differences and eventual bitter civil war between Marshal Tito's Partisans and General Mihailovitch's Chetniks. Its duty was to fight the Germans. However, certain of the local Yugoslav authorities seemed bitterly to resent the British "intrusion," as they considered it, discouraged the stationing of British warships in their ports for operations against the common enemy, and denied them the usual facilities when they arrived there. Relations were seldom easy. There was nearly always an atmosphere of churlish inhospitality and suspicion as to our motives which it was difficult, if not impossible, to eradicate. It was simply not believed that we had no axe to grind; that our whole object was to co-operate with the Yugoslavs in expelling the Germans from their country. There were British and American missions with Tito's army. At one period

hundreds of tons of British and American foodstuffs, clothing and military equipment were being dropped by aeroplane or landed from ships in support of the Yugoslavs. A limit was reached when Yugoslav authorities put obstacles in the way of any Allied supervision of the distribution of goods sent into the country for the benefit of the population as a whole. Supplies subsequently sent into Yugoslavia by the Russians were mostly of American origin. All this reacted upon the work of the Royal Navy.

Much the same sort of thing occurred during the liberation of Greece, where the captains of His Majesty's ships had to exercise the greatest restraint while playing the part of peace-makers.

Politics form no part of the business of the Royal Navy; but towards the end of the war in Europe political strife in some of the newly liberated territories entered largely in the work the Navy was called upon to perform, and greatly increased its complication. A single false step might have provoked a conflagration. Sir John Cunningham, as the Commander-in-Chief, was responsible for what the Navy did. It may be presumptuous for me to say so, but by his dignity, tact, firmness and great wisdom he overcame all the difficulties as they arose and caused his name to be respected. Jealous always of the good name of the Royal Navy, he more than upheld its prestige during a most strenuous and exacting period.

#### IV

November 8th, 1943, was the first anniversary of the Allied occupation of North Africa. It is unnecessary here to re-state the magnitude of the result achieved in twelve months of hard fighting in the Western Mediterranean. But it is pertinent to point out that without the crushing and inexorable weight of Sea Power, built up in merchantmen of all types as well as in warships, the Axis forces could never have been driven from North Africa, and Sicily and Italy could not have been invaded. Nor could the Mediterranean have been freed for the

undisputed passage of convoys to the Indian Ocean and beyond through the Suez Canal.

Figures, though wearisome, are relevant to the proper understanding of the Naval and Merchant Naval share in the Mediterranean campaigns, and in the twelve months indicated 22,526,485 gross tons of Allied merchant shipping *entered* the ports of Casablanca and North Africa. The losses through enemy action, including those sustained during actual operations as well as in the normal routine convoys, amounted to 1.5 per cent. of the total. Some 9½ million tons of cargo were landed in the same ports, of which 4,072,000 tons were represented by petrol, petroleum products, fuel and lubricating oils, kerosene and paraffin. Between one-fifth and one-sixth of the figure last quoted went to supply the needs of aviation, a reminder, if that be needed, of the extent to which the Air Forces were dependent upon seaborne fuel.

The gross tonnage of merchant shipping passing *eastward* through the Sicilian Channel between May 12th, 1943, the date of the final defeat of the Axis forces in Tunisia, and November 8th, was 2,419,322 tons.

In the port of Algiers alone during the twelve months, 650 ocean-going ships and 300 coasters of the United Nations discharged or loaded government supplies, while 130 transports had landed or embarked troops. About 1,900,000 tons of stores of all sorts were off-loaded in Algiers during the same period, this figure including 42,000 vehicles, with guns and tanks, 250,000 tons of ammunition, and 325,000 tons of coal from the United Kingdom, mostly for the use of the French railways and public utility services. Included in these quantities were large consignments of mechanized transport, arms, ammunition and other supplies for the re-equipment of the French Army in North Africa. The stores of all sorts loaded at Algiers during the year and sent to forward areas in ocean-going vessels or coasters, amounted to about 400,000 tons.

By November, 1943, Naples was beginning to get into its stride as a supply port for the Army in Italy. Taranto, Brindisi and Bari were functioning. Palermo, in Sicily, was under the



control of the United States Navy, and when occupied in July the harbour area was found badly battered and congested with wrecks. Nevertheless, in the period August 29th to November 2nd some 203,500 tons of general cargo were landed, exclusive of petroleum products. This figure works out at the satisfactory total of about 5,800 tons a day.

Battles are finally won by infantrymen living and fighting in the most difficult and unimaginable conditions of danger and hardship. War, however, is a matter of close co-operation between navies, armies and air forces working together in unison. No one service contributes more than another; but enough has been said to indicate how greatly all the forces operating ashore are dependent upon supplies carried by sea.

## CHAPTER XII

## THE ADRIATIC, GULF OF GAETA AND ANZIO

## I

FROM the beginning of November, 1943, until the third week in January the necessary gunfire support from the sea was provided to the advance of the Eighth and Fifth Armies operating respectively on the east and west coasts of Italy. Further afield, destroyers bombarded enemy-occupied ports off the coasts of Dalmatia, Albania and eastern Italy, and harried his coastwise shipping.

On the night of November 2nd-3rd, for instance, the *Quilliam* (Captain S. H. Carlill) and *Quail* (Lieutenant-Commander R. F. Jenks) carried out a satisfactory shoot at the Albanian port of Durazzo, while a few evenings later south of Valona, the *Quilliam* and *Raider* (Lieutenant-Commander K. W. Michell), met and engaged a Siebel ferry escorted by three motor-launches. In the short engagement that followed the ferry was set on fire and destroyed, and two of the three escorts were sunk.

Much of the German supply traffic along the eastern shore of the Adriatic and among the islands was carried out by Siebel ferries, which had been used with great success by the enemy during his campaign in North Africa. Mass-produced, heavily armed and capable of a speed of about eight knots in fine weather, they consisted of a pair of barge-like hulls joined together by a central deck. Used in the main for the transport of troops, ammunition, petrol and stores, they could be fitted with alternative armaments for service as gunboats or anti-aircraft vessels.

Another bombardment of Durazzo, which started a large fire

ashore, was carried out by the *Queenborough* (Commander E. P. Hinton), and *Raider*, on the night of November 30th-December 1st. On this occasion the ships were fired upon by enemy shore batteries, though without effect.

About a fortnight later the *Tyrian* (Commander C. W. Greening) and *Teazer* (Lieutenant-Commander R. A. F. Talbot), came upon an enemy tug and lighter off Kotor at night and probably sank the tug, while on the night of December 23rd-24th the same two ships shelled Dubrovnik and sank a *caïque*.

On other occasions in January the *Tyrian* and *Grenville* (Lieutenant-Commander R. P. Hill) shelled the port of Rovigno in the Istrian peninsula south of Pola; the *Troubridge* (Captain C. L. Firth) and *Tumult* (Lieutenant-Commander N. Lanyon), bombarded Dubrovnik and a port in the island of Korcula; while the *Blackmore* and *Ledbury* again attended to Durazzo.

The motor torpedo-boats and gunboats working from the island of Vis were also getting into their stride among the inner leads and channels among the Dalmatian Islands. In one fierce little engagement on the night of December 18th-19th they sank a Siebel ferry, an escort vessel and two motor craft, while the next day an M.T.B. captured two German-manned schooners and made prisoners of their crews. Two nights later M.T.Bs. attacked and torpedoed the small ex-Yugoslav cruiser *Dalmacija*, manned by Germans, which had run ashore on one of the islands and might have been refloated. Incidentally, the *Dalmacija* had once been the German *Niobe*, and had been surrendered after the War of 1914-18.

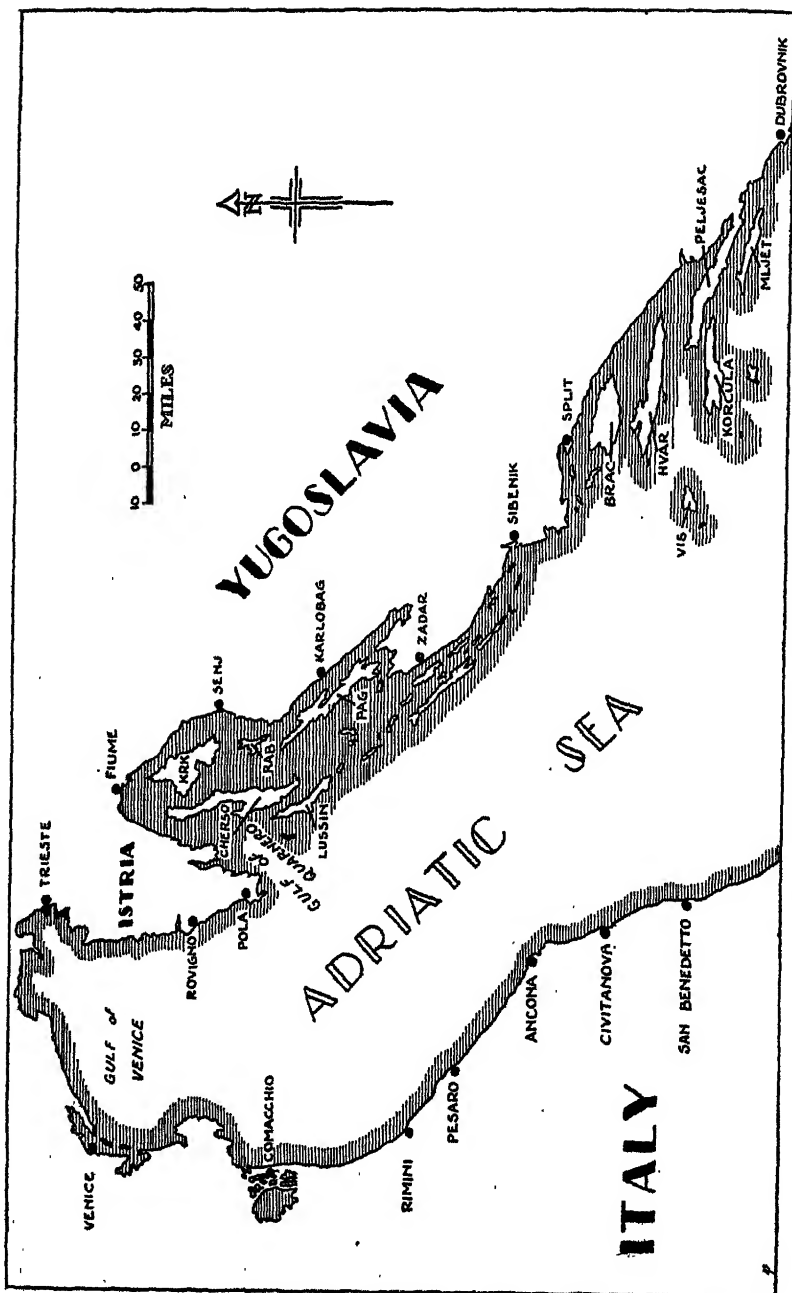
A mere recital of a few of what may be considered the high lights of the work of the destroyers and coastal forces in the eastern Adriatic at this period gives little idea of the work actually done. It was not on every occasion they went to sea that our ships were in action with the enemy, though the perils of navigation in the mined channels among the islands, with their almost complete absence of buoys and lighthouses, were always present. In themselves, these more or less isolated

incidents may not have been of very great importance, though they all fitted into the general pattern of the war at sea. Their cumulative effect was to cause the Germans acute concern for the safety of the sea communications upon which their isolated garrisons depended. From now on the enemy was never to know when or where the next blow was coming, and was forced to expend much time and energy in organizing a convoy system for his coastal and inter-island traffic.

Meanwhile, the same few destroyers were alternating their periodical sweeps by bombarding the enemy on the right flank of the Eighth Army advancing up the east coast of Italy, and by interfering with the German supply line. On November 3rd the *Queenborough* and *Raider* were giving their gunfire support to an attack north of Termoli, while on the night of the 19th-20th, the *Quilliam* and *Loyal*, searching the coast between Pescara and Ancona, met and engaged an enemy convoy close inshore, sinking a lighter and damaging others. In the course of the action the shore guns opened fire, our destroyers losing one man killed and sustaining slight damage. The same two ships bombarded the port of Civitanova, about twenty miles south of Ancona, on the night of the 25th-26th, while three nights later they were supporting the attack of the Eighth Army across the Sangro River.

These naval bombardments and sweeps soon lost their novelty and became more or less a matter of routine, though it has to be remembered that the destroyers were often working in mined waters which had only partially been cleared by our sweepers. The *Quail* was mined and very severely damaged on November 15th. Towed to Bari, she had to be paid off, and was lost some months later while being taken to Taranto for repairs.

On the afternoon of December 2nd, the *Quilliam* and *Loyal* were again shooting up bridges and enemy transport on the coast road north of Pescara, and that night shelled San Benedetto and Ancona, which were both of importance to the enemy as supply bases. They completed their task by sinking three coastal craft and damaging two others, which were abandoned



THE ADRIATIC AND DALMATIAN ISLANDS.

by their crews. The shore batteries again opened fire; but did no damage. A few hours later the *Queenborough* and *Raider* sank a small merchant vessel in the central Adriatic east of Pescara.

The *Troubridge* and *Tumult* had another success a fortnight later when they sank a small enemy supply ship off Civitanova, and on the night of January 3rd-4th the *Jervis* (Captain J. S. Crawford) and *Janus* (Lieutenant-Commander W. B. R. Morrison) struck further north by bombarding the port of Pesaro, about forty miles north-west of Ancona. Three nights afterwards the same two destroyers sank three supply schooners, shelled Ancona and Civitanova, and bombarded the coastal railway and its traffic with great effect.

There was more interference with the enemy's rail traffic on the night of January 8th-9th, when the *Troubridge* and *Tumult* bombarded in the San Benedetto area, while they also damaged four coastal schooners, which were hurriedly abandoned by their crews. The dose was repeated by the same two ships the next night, while the night after that the *Tyrian* and *Grenville* bombarded the little ports of Civitanova and Pedaso, some seventeen miles to the southward.

What with their work on both sides of the Adriatic, this handful of destroyers was never idle. Their bombardments along the east coast of Italy all fitted in with the general plan. For more than 200 miles north from Termini, from which the Eighth Army battered its way, the railway and road run close to the sea. They, with the small ships moving down the coast by night, carried the supplies necessary to the German Army, which it was part of the Navy's duty to intercept by all the means in its power.

## II

Meanwhile there was heavy fighting by the Fifth Army on the west coast of Italy, where the usual gunfire support was provided from the sea. Bombarding north of the Volturno on the night of November 8th, the *Tyrian*, *Tumult*, *Grenville* and *Piorun* (of the Polish Navy) were all in action against German

ground troops and positions, and were again engaged before dawn and after daylight on the 9th, the Air Force co-operating with flare-droppers and bombers.

The Army, after desperate fighting, crossed the Volturno and advanced to the next German line of defence on the Garigliano, some fifteen miles further north. Here, in support, enemy positions and transport in the Minturno area were heavily shelled by the destroyers *Mendip* (Captain C. R. L. Parry), *Nubian* (Commander D. E. Holland-Martin) and *Ilex* (Lieutenant V. A. Wight-Boycott) during daylight on November 23rd, while the cruiser *Orion* (Captain G. C. P. Menzies), with the *Troubridge*, *Paladin* (Lieutenant E. A. S. Bailey) and *Teazer* plastered the same area on the 27th. The same three destroyers bombarded again on the night of December 1st-2nd, their fire being returned by the shore batteries without effect. The eight miles of road between Minturno and Formia, which runs close to the sea, was of great importance to the enemy for supplying their troops on the Garigliano. The area was again heavily pounded by British cruisers and destroyers on January 18th and 19th in support of the Fifth Army's attack across the river.

Bad weather greatly interfered with the operations of the Allied light coastal craft on the west coast of Italy, but on the night of November 21st-22nd they were successful in destroying a lighter laden with petrol near Leghorn. A month later, on the night of December 18th-19th, P.T. boats of the United States Navy met and engaged two enemy destroyers near Elba with guns and torpedoes. Retiring at speed with the P.Ts. in chase, the enemy was later engaged by a mixed force of P.Ts. and British M.T.Bs. Both actions were brisk and very confused, and the enemy's opposition was considerable. Though no results could be seen in the darkness, it is possible that one of the destroyers was hit by a torpedo. P.Ts. were again in action in the Gulf of Genoa on the night of December 29th-30th, when an enemy armed trawler was hit and damaged, while an enemy convoy was attacked off Spezia in the middle of January.

In these high-speed, close-range engagements in the blackness of the night, which were to continue until the end of the war, it was always difficult to observe results. But already the Germans were being taught that their coastal convoys of small craft carrying stores and supplies for their Army were nowhere immune from attack. In the very near future the lesson was to be driven home with even greater effect.

After Salerno the first projected date for the capture of Rome was November, then Christmas, then January or February. Twenty miles inland from the Gulf of Gaeta, however, January saw the Fifth Army still engaged in desperate fighting for Monte Camino, which had to be taken before the launch of any attack upon the even more formidable Cassino, garrisoned by the First German Parachute Division. Their fanatical bravery was to hold up any further advance for four bitter months.

It was the situation inland that brought about the landing at Anzio on January 22nd, 1944.

### III

Anzio lies on the coast some thirty miles south of Rome. The idea of landing British and American troops there was not, as is sometimes supposed, to capture the capital, but to drive east to cut the two main roads to Rome—the Appian Way, some fifteen miles from the coast, and the Frosinone road, fifteen miles further inland—behind the German Army at Cassino. A simultaneous attack would be launched at Cassino, and it was hoped that the enemy, threatened from the rear, would be forced to withdraw. The maintenance by sea of the troops at Anzio was originally planned for a maximum of fifteen days. It was estimated that they would be able to link up with the Fifth Army in a week or ten days, and that once Cassino fell the advance on Rome would begin. This was the general plan; but events happened otherwise.

The facts are well-known. Instead of treating the Anzio landing as a serious threat to his rear and ordering a withdrawal,



Kesselring rushed reinforcements to Cassino and used part of the garrison from Rome to isolate the Anzio bridgehead. It had been intended that after their junction with the Fifth Army the two divisions from Anzio should be supplied by land. The vehicles and supplies were ready. As it was, the troops contained in the narrow bridgehead at Anzio had to be reinforced and supplied by sea for more than four months by a regular shuttle service of landing ships and craft from Naples, as well as by Liberty ships with ammunition and other stores. This not only imposed an immense burden on the Allied Navies; but absorbed valuable shipping at a time when every available ton was beginning to be required for the landings in Normandy and Southern France.

## IV

The small town of Anzio, with Nettuno about two miles to the eastward, are typical seaside bathing resorts with sandy beaches and hotels and well-to-do villas clustered along the waterfront. Anzio has a small harbour enclosed by a breakwater about 600 yards long which shelters it from the southwest. It has a superficial area of about a quarter of a square mile, and is available only for vessels of less than 10 feet draught. Subject to considerable sea and swell with southerly winds, the small craft using the port in peacetime normally lie at anchor with their sterns made fast to the jetty.

The anchorage to seaward is very exposed, so that in bad weather it is impossible for small craft to lie alongside ships at anchor. To the north and east the coast consists of sandy, gently sloping beaches with low dunes above high-water mark. There is little rise and fall in the tide, though, like the anchorage, the beaches are very exposed, so that even in moderate winds the surf makes boatwork difficult and dangerous. In really strong winds beaching is impossible. Inland the terrain is flat and highly cultivated, with the serrated ridge of the Alban Hills in the far background. As at Salerno, the entire area, with the beaches and anchorage, could be commanded

by long-range mobile artillery sited in the many wooded ravines and gullies among the foothills.

In all, some 243 ships of all kinds, including warships, were engaged in the opening phases of the landings, which started at 2 a.m. on January 22nd, 1944. The bulk of the invasion fleet was British and American; but Dutch, Greek, Polish and French vessels participated in the operations as a whole.

The general plan was that one British division should be landed on what was called "Peter" beach some six miles north of Anzio, and an American Division on "X-ray" beach about seven miles east of the town. Simultaneously, a force of American Rangers under Colonel W. O. Darby, which had done so well at Salerno, was to be put ashore from British landing craft on "Yellow" beach, inside the little harbour of Anzio and sheltered by the breakwater from the prevailing winds. The two divisions were given immediate objectives which would establish a bridgehead forming a rough semicircle with a radius about ten miles from Anzio itself, while Colonel Darby's Rangers were to clear up the towns of Anzio and Salerno and then be available as a reserve.

The naval commander of the amphibious task force was Rear-Admiral Frank J. Lowry, U.S.N., with his flag in U.S.S. *Biscayne* (Captain Eichelberg), which, with U.S.S. *Frederick C. Davis* (Lieutenant-Commander Goepner, U.S.N.R.), covered the landing of American troops on "X" beach. The gunfire support was here provided by the American cruiser *Brooklyn* (Captain R. W. Cary), the British cruiser *Penelope* (Captain G. D. Belben) and the United States destroyers *Ludlow*, *Mayo*, *Trippe*, *Edison* and *Woolsey*. As the waters were known to be mined, the American assault was preceded by the minesweepers *Pilot*, *Strive*, *Pioneer*, *Portent*, *Symbol*, *Dexterous*, *Sway* and *Prevail*, under the command of Commander A. H. Richards, U.S.N. With them were a number of "Yard" minesweepers, similar to the British motor minesweepers, and submarine chasers.

Rear-Admiral Thomas H. Troubridge, with his flag in H.M.S. *Bulolo* (Captain C. A. Kershaw), with H.M.S. *Ulster*

*Queen* (Captain M. H. J. Bennett, R.N.R.), commanded the landing of the British troops north of Anzio. The gunfire support here was provided by the cruisers *Orion* (Captain J. P. Gornall), flying the flag of Rear-Admiral J. M. Mansfield, and *Spartan* (Captain P. V. McLaughlin), with a number of destroyers which included the *Laforey* (Captain H. T. Armstrong), *Loyal*, *Fervis* (Captain H. P. Henderson) and *Janus* (Lieutenant-Commander W. B. R. Morrison).

From the date of the landing until the end of May many bombardments were carried out by the ships of the Allied Navies in support of the Army. Some were in the Anzio area, others in the Formia sector, and along the main road to Rome through Itri, Fondi and Terracina. Ships moved with such frequency from one area to the other that it is difficult to trace their day-to-day movements or exactly where they bombarded. But, apart from the warships already mentioned, the following were all to be in action in the course of the next four months: the British cruisers *Dido* (Captain John Terry), *Mauritius* (Captain W. W. Davis) and *Phæbe* (Captain O. P. Frend); the destroyers *Grenville* (Lieutenant-Commander R. P. Hill, later succeeded by Captain H. P. Henderson), *Faulknor* (Lieutenant-Commander E. G. May), *Inglefield* (Acting Commander C. F. H. Churchill), *Kempenfelt* (Lieutenant-Commander J. B. Majoribanks), *Tenacious* (Lieutenant-Commander D. F. Townsend), *Ulster* (Lieutenant-Commander W. S. Donald) and *Urchin* (Lieutenant-Commander J. T. B. Birch).

The French Navy was later represented by the cruiser *Gloire* and the two large destroyers *Le Fantasque* and *Le Malin*.

The British minesweeping force which preceded the Anzio landing at "Peter" beach, or were afterwards employed sweeping off Anzio or in the bombardment areas in the Gulf of Gaeta, were the fleet minesweepers *Fly* (Commander G. N. Rawlings), *Acute* (Commander A. E. Doran), *Circe* (Lieutenant-Commander J. H. McL. Malcolm), *Cadmus* (Lieutenant-Commander J. S. Landers, R.N.R.), *Albacore* (Lieutenant-Commander K. H. Higson, R.N.R.), *Mutine*

(Lieutenant-Commander G. Wallis, R.N.V.R.), *Espiègle* (Lieutenant-Commander C. R. Fraser, R.N.R.), *Rinaldo* (Commander C. H. Corbet-Singleton), *Rothsay* (Commander A. A. Martin, R.N.R.), *Bude* (Lieutenant F. A. J. Andrew) and *Waterwitch* (Lieutenant-Commander D. S. Campbell, R.N.V.R.), with the trawlers *Sheppey* (Lieutenant-Commander O. McNeil, R.N.V.R.), *St. Kilda* (Skipper-Lieutenant R. G. Utting, R.N.R.), *Hornpipe* (Lieutenant H. L. D. Legh, R.N.R.) and *Two-Step* (Lieutenant B. L. Moir, R.N.V.R.), and H.M. Motor Launches 121, 134, 558 and 565.

Other warships that participated in the Anzio area or in the various ancillary operations were the anti-aircraft cruiser *Delhi* (Captain A. T. G. C. Peachey), the anti-aircraft ship *Palomares* (Captain J. H. Jauncey), the destroyers *Brecon*, *Beaufort*, *Croome* and *Tetcott*, with the *Crete* and *Themistocles* of the Greek Navy, the Dutch gunboats *Flores* and *Soemba*, the corvette *Saxifrage*, H.M. tugs *Prosperous* and *Weasel*, and the boom defence vessels H.M.S. *Barmond* and *Barndale*. As usual, there were numerous tank-landing ships and landing craft, which bore numbers only.

The landing of the force of American Rangers to capture the towns of Anzio and Nettuno was carried out under the orders of Captain Errol Turner in H.M.S. *Royal Ulsterman* (Lieutenant-Commander W. R. K. Clark, R.N.R.), with H.M.S. *Princess Beatrix* (Lieutenant-Commander J. D. King, R.N.R.). Captain Turner had with him various British and American landing craft and two submarine-chasers, the American equivalent of the British motor launches.

## v

The sea was flat calm with hardly any breeze as the convoys reached their lowering positions and the first waves of troops moved in towards the shore in their landing and assault craft. It was moonless and very dark; but the first craft touched down on their respective beaches at the appointed time of 2 a.m. without incident.

"Operation Shingle" was the code name for the landing. "Operations of peculiar complexity and hazard of this nature seldom go as planned," Rear-Admiral Troubridge wrote later. "Shingle was an exception, a result I attribute largely to the fact that naval force commanders have at their disposal nowadays a large body of officers and men who are familiar with every aspect of the business, and for whom the process of landing troops and their impedimenta on an unknown hostile shore on a pitch black night is no longer any novelty."

The American landing on "X" beach also took place according to plan, as did that of the Rangers on "Yellow" beach, inside Anzio Harbour, of which Captain Turner wrote: "Craft were led in and touched down at 2.3 a.m. in correct positions, and in this connection I wish to bring to your notice the names of the following officers whose exact execution of orders produced this result: Lieutenant P. R. Thorsen, U.S. Submarine-chaser 522, and Lieutenant B. H. Eskesen, U.S. Submarine-chaser 978, together with Ensigns Abbot and Noel commanding landing craft." All these four officers belonged to the United States Naval Reserve.

The landing came as a complete tactical surprise to the enemy, and except for some machine-gun and small arms fire there was no initial opposition. The disembarkation proceeded smoothly. However, the beaches in the British northern sector were soon found to be unsatisfactory; "the worst in my experience," as Rear-Admiral Troubridge expressed it. The approaches were shallow, with off-shore sand bars, which meant that the large tank-landing ships grounded some way out and had difficulty in reaching the shore, even by using their long, towed pontoons. Moreover, the country immediately inland was almost impossible for use as a maintenance area for dumping the stores and supplies as they came ashore.

It was lucky, therefore, that the town and harbour of Anzio were in Allied hands by 8.15 a.m., and that a certain amount of unloading from landing craft could start there the same afternoon. The facilities were rapidly extended. A sunken schooner, a tug and a mud-hopper were salvaged by the boom defence

vessels *Barmond* and *Barndale*. As the stone jetty inside the harbour was too high to take the ramps of L.S.Ts., 5 feet were blown off the top of it over a sufficient length to take six of these ships lying close alongside each other with their bows touching the shore. By January 25th, indeed, the small harbour could take eight L.S.Ts. and a considerable number of L.C.Ts., while a sloping ramp had been constructed for the use of Dukws swimming from the ships in the anchorage to the shore, and then, as land vehicles, carrying their cargoes direct to the dumps further inland.

Though the landing was a surprise, the Germans were quick to react. There was slight enemy air activity on January 22nd, with spasmodic shelling of Anzio and the beaches. Air attacks and artillery fire both increased on the 23rd, and were to remain a continual menace until the end of May.

Soon after dusk on the 23rd, the destroyer *Janus* was hit by a radio-controlled bomb, and sank in twenty-two minutes with the loss of her commanding officer, Lieutenant-Commander W. B. R. Morrison, six other officers and 152 men. About sixty of her survivors, some of whom were singing "Roll out the Barrel," were rescued by the *Fervis*, *Laforey*, H.M. tug *Weasel* and various small craft. On the same evening, true to form, the Germans deliberately attacked the hospital ships *St. David*, *St. Andrew* and *Leinster*, which were lying some distance to seaward and fully illuminated in accordance with the terms of the Geneva Convention. The *St. David* was sunk and the *Leinster* hit and set on fire, though it was soon got under control. At least seven of the aircraft engaged in this attack were shot down by the fire of the ships or by Allied fighters.

The air attacks after dark on the crowded anchorage were annoying. As one of the *Laforey's* officers said, "It was practically impossible to get a clear picture of what was happening. A number of the larger ships were under way, and the small ones were making smoke." What with the darkness, the clouds of rolling smoke reducing the visibility to practically nothing, the guns flashing in all directions, and the air overhead filled with streams of tracer, things were difficult indeed.

Our gunfire support ships had already been in action against enemy targets. During the first two days the *Jervis* and *Janus* had fired 512 rounds of 4.7-inch shell in various bombardments. The *Orion* and *Laforey* had also done excellent shooting. The *Orion* was to expend 2,640 rounds of 6-inch shell in eleven days of bombarding off Anzio and Formia. Her firing was always most accurate and effective, the forward observation officer on shore signalling such remarks as "Fire effective. Effect beautiful," and "Wizard. All rounds in the target area."

In the Anzio area, in one period of eight days, the *Laforey*, true to her reputation, fired 1,188 rounds of 4.7-inch shell in twenty-six bombardments. In sixteen days she got rid of 2,000 rounds "at one target or another," and was "shot at and bombed in turn every day." Captain Hutton, it is to be noted, had been relieved in the *Laforey* by Captain H. T. Armstrong, another distinguished destroyer officer who had served in the *Wren*, *Maori* and *Onslow* during the war, and had taken part in much fighting, including the operations in Norway, the raid on Vaagso, the sinking of the *Bismarck*, and various of the hard-fought convoys to North Russia and Malta.

Off the American "X" beaches to the eastward, the cruiser *Brooklyn*, with H.M.S. *Penelope* and various of the United States destroyers, were all shelling enemy positions. The *Brooklyn*, firing at enemy tanks with her 6-inch guns, received the message: "No movement since you fired." On another occasion, shooting at very long range, she broke up an enemy counter-attack far inland and blew up a German ammunition or oil dump. The destroyer U.S.S. *Edison*, too, expended nearly 2,000 rounds of 5-inch in twenty days off Anzio. Among the messages she received from the observing officers were: "Many enemy troops killed by your fire. Good work." "You were hitting right on the artillery pieces you were firing at. Wonderful shooting." "Very, very good. Brassed off a bunch of Krauts."

On the afternoon of January 23rd at Anzio, however, the weather began to deteriorate, and a swell started to come in from the westward. The wind rose, and the next day all work

on the American beaches had to be stopped for the time being. It was still worse on the 25th, while that night the wind reached fifty miles an hour, with a steep, breaking sea. Various landing craft were driven ashore, some to become total losses. The British beaches to the northward, however, had already been closed down for a full due, and the loading transferred to Anzio. In spite of the increasing shell fire and air attacks, in spite of the delays caused by bad weather, the build-up of the Army ashore, which was the principal task of the Navies, was still ahead of schedule.

The work continued; but after dark on January 29th, the cruiser *Spartan*, which had been used for bombarding, was hit by a radio-controlled bomb, with a loss of sixteen officers and men killed or missing. Badly ablaze, there was the likelihood of a magazine exploding, while the pillar of flame was a tempting target for further air attacks. The ship was a total loss; but Captain McLaughlin paid a high tribute to those in an American fire-fighting tug and all the other vessels which closed the *Spartan* to pick up survivors. "In particular," he wrote, "H.M.S. *Barndale's* captain, Lieutenant R. L. Jones, R.N.R., displayed fine seamanship and courage when he placed his ship alongside the hull when she was on her beam ends. His action enabled a number of severely wounded men to be saved." The *Barndale*, which has been mentioned before, was one of the boom defence vessels which had done such good work at Naples.

We were to incur another loss off the Anzio beach-head on February 25th, when the destroyer *Inglefield* was hit and sunk by a radio-controlled bomb with a loss of thirty-five officers and men.

Apart from the radio-controlled bomb, the Germans tried out yet another new weapon against the Allied Navies off Anzio. This was the 'one-man submarine,' which consisted of a man in a diving dress seated in a torpedo travelling on the surface with another live torpedo slung beneath which could be released and sent on its way when a target presented itself. The crude weapon, which travelled at very slow speed,



achieved nothing. One remembers the interest when one of the parent torpedoes, with the man still inside it, came ashore near one of the American beaches at Anzio. An official U.S. Army photographer was promptly on the spot, but, considerably to his annoyance, was not allowed to publish the results of his handiwork. It was another case of necessary naval censorship. In other words, we did not want the Germans to become aware that we knew of their new weapon.

The gallant *Penelope*, which had an outstanding war record, and had done further excellent work by bombarding in the Anzio and Formia areas, was lost on February 18th not far from the Pontine Islands, some thirty-five miles west of Naples. She was torpedoed by a U-boat, and ten minutes later there was a violent explosion abreast of the after funnel, which may have been caused by a magazine. The ship sank in forty seconds with a loss of more than 230 officers and men. Her commanding officer, the gallant Captain G. D. Belben, who was seen in the water encouraging and helping swimmers, and refused to be rescued before one group of them were saved, did not survive.

## VI

It is none of our business to describe what happened on shore after the first landing at Anzio; but instead of an operation lasting perhaps a week or ten days, the assault and its subsequent reinforcement and supply developed into a long-drawn-out commitment which was to provide a major naval responsibility until the end of May.

It was a rare day that Anzio did not receive its quota of shell and bombs, with frequent minelaying by aircraft in the approaches. For four weary months the British and American port parties and beach battalions, with a large number of landing ships and landing craft, together with warships and merchant vessels of many descriptions, laboured on at their tasks of supplying and supporting the Army. It was necessary to bring reinforcements and stores in a steady stream, and

while the tank landing ships were for the most part commanded by officers of the Royal Naval Reserve, practically all of the landing craft and small vessels were in charge of junior officers who, like the others, repeatedly ran the gauntlet and underwent constant shelling and bombing attacks while unloading. Their work was beyond all praise.

Typical, perhaps, of the work of the landing craft was that of one which made eight round trips between Naples and Anzio in a period of thirty-five days with 1,250 officers and men, and carrying, with other miscellaneous cargo, 40 tons of high explosive and 225 hydrogen cylinders. Constantly under shell fire, she endured thirteen bombing attacks.

The L.S.Ts. ran similar risks, and one of them entered Anzio Harbour no less than fifteen times, carrying about 3,000 officers and men from Naples and 750 trucks laden with nearly 4,000 tons of ammunition. As one of her officers said, "Anzio was unpleasant right up to the last. When you're full up with ammunition, it's not very comfortable to provide a sitting target for any shell or bomb. Twice we were nearly caught; but escaped with near-misses which caused a bit of damage. Once we had to stay seven hours in the port, unloading food for the troops. Usually it took about two and a half hours, unloading about fifty-five truck-loads of ammunition and taking away the empties, rather like the milkman delivering the morning's supply and taking away the empty bottles. The return trips to Naples were always the most cheerful."

There was always the danger that an L.S.T. might be hit and sunk in the narrow entrance to the harbour, already seriously obstructed by wrecks. If this had happened it might have made it impossible for any further stores to be landed in the port itself.

Here is the unpretentious tale of L.C.T. 563, commanded by Skipper-Lieutenant Benjamin Duncan McPherson, R.N.R., an old trawler skipper from Granton. Her "chief engineer," officially Leading Motor Mechanic S. A. Briggs, aged twenty, of Sudbury, Suffolk, had worked in a garage before the war, while the "first Lieutenant," Sub-Lieutenant R. W. Smith

R.N.V.R., of West Bromwich, Staffordshire, had been in the building trade before joining the Navy in 1940. Among her ship's company she numbered a carpenter from Much Marcle, Ledbury, a bricklayer from Birmingham, labourers from Caterham and Birmingham, a butcher from Perthshire, a hosiery knitter from Leicester, an aluminium-caster from Birmingham, an electrician from Gunnislake, Cornwall, and a lorry-driver from Bristol. The oldest rating in the ship, Stoker J. M. Pearce, of Herne Hill, London, was aged forty-one. Described as a painter in civil life, he was also an old soldier who had done his full time in the Army, but preferred the Navy when he joined up in 1942. This crew, one supposes, was fairly typical of the men in the landing craft. Not one of them had thought of ever serving at sea before the war began.

Detailed for the operation at Anzio, L.C.T. 563 duly delivered her load of tanks to the beaches on D-day and then returned to Naples for reloading. With a full cargo of ammunition, she left Naples in the early morning, butting into stiff wind and a rising sea. By noon the weather was bad and conditions far from comfortable. By four o'clock in the afternoon she was making water and it was considered advisable to start pumping. At about 4.30 the generator packed up making it impossible to pump, and the motor mechanic could not repair the broken part. By five o'clock the water level was getting dangerously high and all hands were set to baling out with buckets. They might as well have used teaspoons, so she was regretfully (knowing the urgency of the cargo) decided to turn back. The Senior Officer's permission was obtained, and L.C.T. 563 turned round, leaving the rest of the convoy to carry on.

With her stern to the sea she rode the weather much better though it was still necessary to keep baling out until about midnight. It was dark when she turned round—a dirty black night full of wind and rain and sea. A warship narrowly missed cutting her in half at about nine o'clock, but that crisis passed. Time went on. It was getting time to pick up Ischia Light,





A Cruiser bombarding enemy shore positions as the landing craft close in on the beaches of Anzio.

when the already poor visibility began to get worse. The wind moderated, but the fog came down. Mixed with the fog was smoke, because an air raid over Naples had caused a smoke-screen to be put up. Speed was reduced to slow. It was impossible to find out the ship's accurate position. Blindfold, she crept on with Ischia somewhere to port—or so it was hoped. If she failed to turn the corner at the right spot, the prospect of a rather unhealthy minefield loomed ahead. At last came a rift in the gloom and a faint glimpse of a light. Only a few seconds; but sufficient to identify it as Ischia. A quick bearing and a rough estimate of distance and her position was fixed—roughly speaking. Visibility closed down again, but she was able to steer a course with a little more confidence. Blindfold, she turned the corner and crept on, and after a while the reduced sea made it obvious that she was in the comparative shelter of the Gulf of Naples. The sea and wind grew less. Visibility lifted a little, and a slightly darker mass was identified as land. Contact was made with the signal station and her presence reported, when down came more fog and smoke. A large troopship shaved the L.C.T.'s stern as she lay stopped off Nisida. A destroyer nearly collided, whereupon it was decided that the locality was a little too crowded for comfort. With fog-horn squeaking and the ship almost awash, she crept on towards Naples; but with the anchorage very full it was dangerous to attempt to find the harbour entrance. So the engines were stopped and she was allowed to lie to for the rest of the night, completely blind, but with all hands on the lookout and fog-horn doing full duty.

Daylight came and, with it, realization. As the mists cleared and the land came into view, it was seen that she was lying well in the centre of the minefield—with a load of ammunition on board!

Her luck held. She came out without exploding a mine. Briggs, the Motor Mechanic, sending the other two engine-room ratings on to the upper deck, himself remained at the engine controls the whole time the ship was known to be in the minefield.

## VII

There were about forty L.S.Ts. to do the regular ferry runs to and fro between Naples and Anzio, the passage being done by night, with some 1,700 trucks to travel in them. This allowed for a daily arrival at Anzio of eight to ten L.S.Ts. with pre-loaded trucks, which moved straight ashore to the dumps. By this method 1,500 to 2,000 tons a day were loaded from L.S.Ts. alone with a minimum of handling.

At Anzio there were usually four Liberty ships in the anchorage, with a varying number of L.C.Ts. to discharge them, and 450 Dukws. There was always a shortage of L.C.Ts., and during one period of heavy shelling the masters of the Liberty ships were rather disinclined to come close inshore, some of them lying seven miles out at sea, too far for the Dukws. Finally, a letter was sent to the masters of all ships arriving at Anzio advertising the advantages of coming closer in: "They would be under the anti-aircraft umbrella from the shore. They would be safer from E-boats. They would be discharged very much quicker, and in any case the chances of being hit by a shell were only one in 37,000—a good round number. One good old sportsman came in. We plied him with Dukws, and took 1,500 tons off him in twenty-four hours. He was empty before all the others. After that there was no further trouble, and we generally averaged 1,000 to 1,200 tons a day by Dukws alone."

This amount, added to the 1,500 to 2,000 tons a day of the L.S.Ts. and the 2,000 to 3,000 tons of the L.C.Ts., produced a total daily tonnage landed in fine weather of 4,500 to 6,200 tons, though it was sometimes exceeded.

The main lesson learnt was that the whole machinery of discharge was a delicately-balanced instrument, and that everyone, the captains of the Liberty ships and the L.C.T., the stevedores, the beach-masters, the Dukw drivers, the motor transport ashore and the dump personnel were parts of one team who must pull together for the common good. During one period of bad shelling the stevedores in one ship decided

to empty as quickly as possible regardless of the rules. "They literally hurled the stuff out of the holds into the L.C.Ts., and filled them in about four hours instead of the usual six," as an eye-witness wrote. "But what happened? The cargo was shockingly stowed in the L.C.T.—ammunition of various kinds all mixed up with boxes of ordnance stores, food and engineering equipment. It took thirty-six hours to empty that L.C.T. on the beach, and even then many trucks went to the ammunition dump with mixed loads of ammunition, and were consequently held up there. With the shortage of L.C.Ts., the hold-up was badly felt, and that particular Liberty ship had to wait all the longer because her stevedores had tried to save an hour or two."

Commander C. S. Lockhart was the Naval Officer-in-Charge at Anzio from February 20th until his relief by Commander S. A. Brooks on April 10th. Of this period Commander Lockhart was to write restrainedly: "The shelling occurred practically every day, causing slight damage to shipping and casualties. Air raids generally developed at dusk and dawn, in consequence of which H.M.S. *Inglefield*, L.S.T. 305 and L.C.I.(L.) 273 were lost, and L.C.Ts. 551 and 227 were severely damaged."

Reading between the lines of Commander Lockhart's more detailed diary, one realizes the conditions in which the people at Anzio worked and lived. Here are a few typical extracts:

"*February 24th.* Shelling with greater accuracy, many dropping in the harbour and close to Navy House. Mortally wounded C.O. of L.C.T. 625 and several Army personnel working on North Hard."

"*February 29th.* Shelling again very concentrated. L.S.T. 197 hit and a small fire started while unloading alongside West Hard. Casualties among Army personnel. L.S.T. 214 hit while discharging at North Hard. Slight casualties among naval and Army personnel."

"*March 2nd.* Continuous shelling as far as six or seven miles out at sea. Sneak raider dropped large bomb on building immediately behind Navy House at 2315. Army casualties;



but no naval, and only slight damage to Navy House. Very gratifying to report that naval personnel were first on the scene to render assistance."

"*March 5th.* Anti-personnel shells close to Navy House. Wind gale force. Heavy swell."

"*March 11th.* Shelling more intense. Many alerts. One air raid on anchorage at midnight. One torpedo-bomber shot down. No damage to shipping. Sharp dive-bombing attack at 0715 over port area. Damage to sea wall. Several buildings destroyed. Main road from port blocked for some time."

Such comments as "Intense shelling," "Continuous shelling during the day," "Sharp air attack. Suspected minelaying" occur day after day. Then:

"*March 17th.* Several air raids. Sharp attack on harbour at 0330. L.C.I.(L.) 273 near-missed, causing several naval casualties, and she eventually capsized. L.C.Ts. 551 and 277 seriously damaged by blast. Six bombs close to Navy House, one failing to explode."

"*March 18th.* Flares and bombs in anchorage. E-boat sunk by patrol craft (American) at 2330."

"*March 25th.* H.M.S. *Grenville* reports one E-boat sunk at 0030 and prisoners taken."

The E-boat was first engaged with gunfire and was then sunk by ramming.

"*April 1st.* Shelling on an increased scale. L.S.T. 386 straddled by two shell and near-missed by one, causing casualties in L.C.T.(L.) 47, alongside at the time."

"*April 4th.* Shelling very concentrated during the night. Damage to four cranes on South Mole."

"*April 6th.* Intermittent shelling. Near miss to L.C.T. 34, causing considerable under water damage. Signal Station near-missed, causing death by fragmentation of one ordinary signalman."

The heavy shelling and air raids were to continue until the Germans were finally driven to the northward by the Allied Armies. On the night of May 28th-29th, just before the German withdrawal, 604 shell fell in the Anzio port area.

Someone had the heart to count them. At this time the German withdrawal was imminent. The enemy's final outburst of hate was probably brought about to save the trouble of carrying this ammunition away.

The Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Sir John Cunningham, visited Anzio, and on March 14th sent the following message: "I have been watching with pride and satisfaction the devotion to duty of the officers and men of the Anzio port party and the landing ships and craft who have for fifty-one days cheerfully and tirelessly kept the Allied Armies supplied in the Anzio bridgehead. The work has been arduous, monotonous and dangerous, but you have conducted yourselves in a manner which is in accordance with the highest traditions of the Service, and one which has played and will play a major part in the final victory of the Allied Armies in Italy. Well done, good luck, and keep it up."

They did keep it up, as the following figures for the tonnage of supplies landed in the Anzio area most clearly show:

<i>Month</i>	<i>Total tonnage landed</i>	<i>Largest daily total</i>
January (nine days)	.. 27,250	5,956 on 31st
February ..	.. 100,068	5,930 on 15th
March ..	.. 158,906	7,828 on 29th
April ..	.. 97,778	5,633 on 4th
May ..	.. 210,789	7,015 on 27th

Thus, in spite of the constant bombing and shell fire, and the many interruptions caused by bad weather, a total of 594,791 tons of miscellaneous supplies for the Army was landed in 130 days in a small, shallow harbour a quarter of a mile square and over an open beach susceptible to surf and to every wind that blew from the westward. The average of 4,575 tons a day was a credit to all concerned.

## CHAPTER XIII

## SEAWAYS TO ROME

## I

LATER in the year 1944 the Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean, General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, addressed a message to Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, Admiral Sir John Cunningham. He said:

"I would be grateful if you would convey to the personnel of the minesweeping flotillas in the Mediterranean theatre my appreciation of the manner in which they have carried out their tasks in connection with the operations that have taken place under my direction in 1944. The response that they have given to meet the almost continuous calls for the clearance of channels to further land operations has evoked the admiration of the other Services. Great credit is also due to them for the manner and speed in which any new technique or invention on the part of the enemy has been overcome, often at great risk to those engaged on such a task."

Mines, as is well-known, are of three main varieties—moored contact, acoustic and magnetic. Since any or all of these might be found near a hostile coast or in waters recently occupied by the enemy, it followed that a complete mine-sweeping force must contain the variously equipped vessels to deal with all types of mines, and that certain areas must be swept more than once. Nomenclature varies in the British and American Navies; but in general there were five main types of sweepers.

The British fleet minesweepers and their American counterparts, the "A" minesweepers or A.Ms., had names—H.M.S. *Rothsay*, *Rosario*, *Arcturus*, *Welfare*, etc., and U.S.S. *Sway*, *Pilot*, *Implicit*, *Chickadee*, etc. These were used for sweeping

ahead of convoys, as well as for clearing channels in the open sea in tolerably bad weather, and, on occasion, for normal convoy and anti-submarine work.

The British motor minesweepers (M.M.S.), or their American equivalents the Yard minesweepers (Y.M.S., or B.Y.M.S. when British-manned), were wooden vessels used primarily for sweeping magnetic and acoustic mines in coastal waters and in the approaches to harbours.

Specially fitted British motor launches (M.Ls.), and their American counterparts, the submarine-chasers (S.C.), worked in areas where the mines had been laid shallow.

Trawlers, which had names, or vessels of similar type, were used for searching sweeps, or in areas where shallow draught was not of primary importance. They were also employed for laying "dams," or buoys, to mark swept areas, as well as for normal escort and anti-submarine work.

Boat minesweepers were small landing craft specially fitted for sweeping very close inshore, usually in assault areas.

The minesweeping forces used off the British and American beaches for the assault at Anzio on January 22nd, 1944, were mentioned in the last chapter. The area had been thickly mined by the enemy, and many mines were swept or destroyed during the assault period. A few ships were lost through mines in both sectors; but as in Sicily and at Salerno, the landings at Anzio would have been impossible without the sweepers. Preparatory to the latter operation, too, a channel some ninety miles had to be swept from Naples for the use of the shipping moving to the bridgehead, while, because of the chance of fresh minelaying by submarines, E-boats or aircraft, it had to be searched regularly. Other areas in the Gulf of Gaeta for the use of ships bombarding on the left flank of the Fifth Army were also cleared during January.

The immediate approach channels to Anzio, where the enemy was assiduous in laying mines from aircraft in the hope of interrupting the flow of supplies to the Army, presented a difficult problem. Minelaying usually occurred two or three times a week, and no fewer than 141 ground mines dropped

by aircraft were swept between January and June. Those close inshore were dealt with by a force of American Y.M.S. and British M.M.S. working under the direction of Commander W. L. Messmer, U.S.N., and Lieutenant Norman Searles, R.N.V.R., the Port Minesweeping Officer at Anzio. Further afield in deeper water the situation was met by the American A.Ms. and British fleet sweepers. April and May were particularly prolific. From April 15th to the 19th U.S.S. *Symbol* and *Seer*, working offshore, accounted for twenty-four mines, while sixteen ground mines were detonated in the anchorage and its approaches during May.

As it was imperative that the flow of supplies should continue, risks had to be taken by the sweepers. Casualties necessarily occurred among them. However, the point to be emphasized is that there were no mine casualties among the hundreds of ships supplying the Anzio bridgehead. The part played by the minesweepers was of outstanding importance to the operation as a whole, and it is no exaggeration to say that they contributed greatly to the occupation of Rome by the Allied Army on June 4th.

Further south, on May 13th, a Minesweeping Force under G. N. Rawlings, in H.M.S. *Fly*, started to clear a further area for the bombarding cruisers in the Gulf of Gaeta. The sweeping was carried out in daylight in clear view of the enemy's guns. There were times when the flotilla was heavily shelled, the turns being made under cover of smoke-screens laid by the sweepers and an escorting American destroyer, which engaged the German batteries with her 5-inch. It was a dangerous and gallant bit of work.

During May, too, further sweeping was carried out from Ischia to Formia and Gaeta by British M.Ls., M.M.S. and B.Y.M.S., while further west, off Terracina, the 156th B.Y.M.S. Flotilla cut thirty-three shallow mines.

The naval bombardments from the Gulf of Gaeta had started in January. The good work of the cruiser *Orion* has already been mentioned, and before her unfortunate loss on February 18th the *Penelope* also had done some fine shooting.

In the Formia area she fired some 1,200 rounds of 6-inch in four days, with another 783 rounds between February 8th and 10th. In some seven days of day and night bombardments the *Dido* expended more than 3,000 rounds of 5.25-inch ammunition, while the *Phæbe* was responsible for 792 rounds in four days.

The destroyer *Kempenfelt* neatly bisected a train near Formia on January 27th, while in two days the cruiser *Mauritius* fired some 400 rounds in five direct bombardments of roads and enemy positions near Terracina. On January 28th the *Mauritius* completed her hundredth bombardment since joining the Mediterranean Fleet in June, 1943, and between the 24th of that month and March 10th fired 3,156 shell at Anzio, Terracina and Formia. It must have been a cause of satisfaction to Captain Davis and his ship's company when the *Mauritius* received the thanks of the Corps Commander for her effective fire support, as also on January 27th, when, after shooting at mechanized transport and motorized infantry, she received a message from the forward observation officer on shore: "Shoot very effective. Germans abandoned their lorries and were last reported making good time on foot towards the mountains."

On another occasion the cruiser *Orion* had taken over a target outside the range of the 4.7's of the destroyer *Loyal*, but was using the *Loyal's* forward observation officer. So the destroyer signalled to the cruiser, "Thou shalt not pinch thy neighbour's F.O.O.," to which the *Orion* replied: "Many are called, but F.O.O. are chosen."

The targets engaged during these many bombardments were roads, bridges, railways, enemy batteries, transport and troop concentrations. Shooting was carried out by day and by night, and the ships were frequently under fire from the shore batteries. As a Corps Commander wrote: "Naval support during recent operations has been of particular value. . . . During the period January 26th to February 18th naval supporting fire was given on all but five days from cruisers, and harassing fire was carried out on thirteen nights. The value of the continuous nature of the support . . . cannot be over-emphasized. The

ammunition expenditure involved, over 5,000 rounds, mostly 6-inch shell, has undoubtedly paid a very good dividend. . . . I wish to express my grateful thanks to all those who have carried out this long period of naval support on our sea flank. The division most interested is particularly grateful for the wholehearted, efficient and enthusiastic co-operation which has at all times been forthcoming whenever weather conditions allowed."

All the bombardments just mentioned were carried out during the fighting around Minturno at a period when the link-up between the Fifth Army and the Anzio troops was still a possibility. Further inland, however, Cassino did not fall, and in spite of its heavy bombing the desperate battle was broken off on March 28th with the monastery still in possession of the Germans. There followed six weeks of indecisive fighting, during which General Alexander transferred the bulk of the Eighth Army to the vital area. Its movement was kept secret, and the enemy knew nothing of it. Then on May 11th the Fifth and Eighth Armies launched their assault on the "Gustav" Line, and on May 18th, the town and monastery of Cassino were captured. Simultaneously, the Americans on the left flank captured Formia and Gaeta, and swept on.

This advance along the west coast was again strongly supported by gunfire from the sea. Itri, Fondi and Terracina, with the road between them, all suffered devastating bombardments from cruisers and destroyers. In a period of six days, cruisers fired nearly 3,000 rounds, and in a single day one ship fired more than 800. What with naval gunfire and bombing, the towns, as one saw later, were blasted into ruin, while the roads, crowded with transport, became littered with blazing and battered vehicles.

After further heavy bombardments, in which cruisers and destroyers participated, the troops at Anzio were set in motion of May 22nd. By June 1st they had fought their way through to the Alban Hills, and on June 4th, two days before the Allied landings in Normandy, Rome, the first European capital to be liberated, was in the hands of the Allies.

Civitavecchia, forty miles north-west of the capital, was occupied on June 8th, and a naval port party established there the next day. A force of small minesweepers entered San Stefano, another forty miles up the coast from Civitavecchia, on June 9th, to find the place clear of Germans and white flags flying ashore.

The minesweepers were still kept busy, and by the end of June had opened no less than 120 miles of a new inshore channel to Civitavecchia, San Stefano and Piombino. It was more or less a race with the Army, and M.Ls. again played a prominent part. They cut thirty-one mines in one narrow stretch of about forty miles, and on one occasion at least came under fire while working close inshore behind the enemy's lines. Their work was constantly being delayed through loss of minesweeping gear caused by the German anti-sweeping devices and obstructions.

## II

Towards the end of 1943 the invasion of Southern France was already in the planning stage, and the use of the Straits of Bonifacio, between Corsica and Sardinia, would greatly shorten the distance for convoys moving to the south of France from Naples and the east. Certain ships of the 14th Minesweeping Flotilla had cleared forty-seven mines to the west of the Straits between October and December, 1943. The 13th Minesweeping Flotilla, led by Commander A. A. Martin, R.N.R., in the *Rothsay*, cleared sixty-one more mines from this same area between February 14th and 20th, 1944, and attacked the thicker fields in the centre of the Straits and to the eastward in April and May. With the assistance of M.M.S., M.Ls., and three whalers, Commander Martin completed his formidable task by May 11th. In all some 229 mines had been cleared from the Straits of Bonifacio since the previous October with the sweepers working in rough winter weather, while by June 30th a total of 447 mines had been cleared from the Straits and the waters round Corsica.



## III

Operating on the east coast of Italy in the spring and summer of 1944 were the five little ships of the Second Mine-sweeping Flotilla under the command of Captain Ralph Newman of the Royal New Zealand Naval Volunteer Reserve, in the *Aberdare*. The others were the *Derby*, *Fareham*, *Bagshot* and *Harrow*. The *Stoke*, which had once belonged to the flotilla, was sunk at Tobruk during the siege, and the *Abingdon* during the bombing of Malta.

All of these ships were twin-screw minesweepers of 710 tons built during the war of 1914-18, and were twenty-five to twenty-seven years old. Because they burnt coal instead of the almost universal oil fuel, people came to call them the "Smoky Joes."

September, 1939, found them at Singapore. Then, when war broke out with Italy in the following June, they were hurriedly recalled to the Mediterranean. They made the long voyage with a collier in company, coaling at sea as necessary. It was none too easy a job in the swell of the Indian Ocean, with every ton of coal having to be shovelled into bags and hoisted from ship to ship.

They were kept hard at it in the Mediterranean, taking it in turns to sweep the fairway out of Tobruk during the siege, and the *Aberdare* was of the last ships to leave when it fell. They swept off North Africa, Greece and Crete, and during the Eighth Army's push towards Tripoli in 1942 the *Fareham* alone accounted for fifty-seven mines. Later they were minesweeping off Malta, and when Italy surrendered were sent to Taranto. In May, 1944, they swept an inshore channel from Bari to Manfredonia, some sixty-five miles, and with the advance of the Eighth Army in June continued it to Ortona, another 130 miles, the work being completed by June 16th.

From Ortona the 151st B.Y.M.S. Flotilla with M.Ls. continued the channel northward, and by June 30th these sweepers were ahead of the Eighth Army and came under

enemy gunfire, which they returned. By July 23rd they had swept as far as Ancona, and by the end of August the channel had been extended nearly to Pesaro, which was still in German hands. Continuing the channel as the Eighth Army advanced to Rimini, B.Y.M.S., M.M.S. and M.Ls. cut some seventy mines. These same sweepers also had the hard and difficult task of providing clear water for the destroyers bombarding on the right flank of the Army, while the swept channel was later continued to Ravenna. As a report from the Adriatic stated: "The minesweepers are being worked very hard and are doing a magnificent job in trying circumstances. They have been under the fire of shore batteries on several occasions."

## IV

Some mention has already been made of the work of the Allied Light Coastal Forces off the West Coast of Italy. From January, 1944, onwards, these small craft working from Bastia continued to be used with great success against the enemy convoys creeping up and down the coast between Spezia, Genoa and the Piombino Channel, between Elba and the mainland. There were numerous clashes at night in which losses were inflicted on the enemy, while on various occasions E-boats trying to attack the shipping off Anzio were driven off with casualties. Thus the terse communiqué of February 22nd: "A group of E-boats, attempting to approach Anzio during the night of February 20th-21st, were driven off by American patrol craft. One E-boat blew up after being hit, and a second is believed to have been driven ashore."

But a new technique was evolved, that of using L.C.Gs. (Landing Craft, Gun) in conjunction with the British M.T.Bs. and M.G.Bs., and the American P.Ts. L.C.Gs., incidentally, were similar in outward appearance to L.C.Ts. but, instead of carrying vehicles, mounted a mixed battery of guns manned as a rule by Royal Marines.

It was known that the enemy convoys made use of the Piombino Channel, so plans were made to intercept them. At

about midnight on March 28th-29th two L.C.Gs. were in this channel with an Anglo-American force of light coastal craft to the northward. The latter intercepted an enemy convoy of F-lighters with a screen of two destroyers. Pressing home their attacks on the destroyers to close range our craft forced them to withdraw to the northward, leaving the F-lighters more or less at the mercy of the L.C.Gs. Escape was impossible for the enemy. Four of the F-lighters were set on fire and blew up, and two more were disposed of later. From the fierce flames and explosions it was obvious they were carrying petrol and ammunition. In that encounter our light coastal craft had one ship slightly damaged and two men wounded.

A similar success occurred in the early hours of April 25th, when just after midnight an enemy convoy was seen trying to steal down the coast north of the Piombino Channel. The L.C.Gs. came into action, and soon destroyed two F-lighters and an ocean-going tug. Another lighter blew up, and a fourth was set on fire and burnt furiously before going up in a spectacular explosion. The action was fought so close to the coast that star-shell and "overs" from the L.C.Gs. started fires in the pine woods ashore. The targets became obscured by smoke, so light coastal craft were sent in to finish off any enemy craft that remained. They found one more F-lighter and demolished her.

The enemy convoys were numerous that night, for about half an hour after the first engagement another group of F-lighters was spotted. Two of them were promptly engaged by the L.C.Gs. and destroyed, while a third, badly hit and blazing, retired behind a smoke-screen, only to be found later and sunk by a M.T.B. Another half-hour passed, when American P.Ts. came upon a third enemy force and attacked, to see one more F-lighter blow up and sink. It was getting on towards dawn when light coastal craft made the fourth and final contact of the night with an unidentified force of enemy craft which withdrew at full speed after a short skirmish.

That night's work resulted in the loss to the enemy of nine F-lighters, five of which were carrying stores for the German

Army, and one ocean-going tug. Our vessels sustained no damage or casualties whatever.

In both these most successful strikes the operations of the composite Anglo-American force were directed by Commander R. A. Allan, R.N.V.R. Admiral Sir John Cunningham sent a message of congratulation to all concerned. In particular, he praised both the staff work involved in preparing the operation, and the "brilliant" manner in which it was carried out.

Another fine action was fought on the night of May 27th-28th by an Anglo-American force of light coastal craft on patrol close in to the Italian coast about ten miles north-west of Spezia. Lieutenant Robert Varvill, R.N.V.R., in M.T.B. 421, was in command, and in company were M.T.B. 419 (Lieutenant Albert Hazen Moore, R.N.V.R.), M.T.B. 420 (Lieutenant Edward Spencer Good) and P.T. 218 (Lieutenant (j.g.) G. Reed, U.S.N.R.).

The weather was fine, with good visibility and light westerly airs with no sea or swell. A thin crescent moon to the westward was not due to set until 1.15 a.m. At five minutes past midnight the dark shapes of vessels were seen coming round a headland about one and a half miles to the westward. They could only be enemy ships, so Varvill closed them at low speed to avoid giving himself away by his wash. He soon made out one E-boat escorting five F-lighters in line ahead. During the approach our craft actually passed within 200 yards of the E-boat, which took no notice.

Nine minutes after the first sighting, Varvill fired two torpedoes. Two of the F-lighters were hit, and blew up with heavy explosions and large clouds of white smoke. Then M.T.B. 419 fired, but missed, to be followed almost immediately by P.T. 218, which claimed a hit. A few minutes later M.T.B. 420 fired, and another F-lighter disintegrated with a violent explosion. The escorting E-boat opened up an ineffectual fire on our craft as they retired, and was presently engaged by one of the F-lighters that remained afloat, with what result we do not know.

Our four craft reformed and searched for the enemy, though for the time being nothing further was seen. So they resumed their patrol to the north-westward, and at 1.37 a.m. were again rewarded by sighting two vessels at a distance of about half a mile. The first was a sloop or small destroyer, and the second a merchant ship of about 1,500 tons which was making thick black smoke from her funnel.

Two minutes after the first sighting M.T.B. 419 and P.T. 218 both fired torpedoes. The merchantman was hit and broke in half, her bow portion sinking at once and the stern catching fire and lifting out of the water. The enemy escort vessel then opened fire at Good's ship, M.T.B. 420, hitting her bridge and charthouse, damaging her engines, and slightly wounding two men. The firing continued as our boats withdrew seaward with the satisfaction of knowing that three F-lighters and one merchant ship carrying stores and supplies for the German Army had been well and truly dealt with. In the report of these actions, particular mention was made of Petty Officer Motor Mechanic Cyril Albert John Joseph, who, after the two main engines of M.T.B. 420 were put out of action by enemy gunfire, showed zeal and great initiative in making the necessary repairs, thus allowing his ship to withdraw at high speed from a situation that might well have resulted in her loss.

If our figures are accurate, Allied coastal forces working off the west coast of Italy, assisted on one occasion by L.C.Gs., sank or destroyed twenty-two enemy vessels during the months of May and June, with three more probably sunk, one captured, eight damaged, and three forced to run themselves ashore. Our losses over the same period amounted to six officers and men killed and twenty-six wounded, with moderate damage to one craft and superficial injuries to six.

At a time when the German armies in western Italy were becoming more and more dependent upon supplies carried by sea, the work of the Anglo-American squadron of light craft was of very great importance. As Commander Allan wrote in one of his reports: "The magnificent fighting spirit shown by the officers and ratings is all the more evident when it is



Smoke screen from  
U.S. destroyer  
while circling British  
Cruiser *Dido* at thirty  
knots, during enemy  
retaliatory fire, 1944.



remembered that they have all the time operated in heavily mined waters, and have frequently encountered opposition from enemy shore batteries. It is considered that such losses inflicted on the enemy have been very detrimental to the morale of his sea forces, as well as to the fighting strength of his army on shore."

One can agree. Moreover, for nearly another year the good work of the light coastal craft was to continue.

## v

The main highway from Rome to Naples passes over the Volturmo near Capua. Some six miles further on it branches into two separate roads, that to the north—"Route 6"—passing inland through the mountainous country round Cassino, and on through Arco, Frosinone and Valmontone. The southern road—"Route 7," the old Appian Way—skirts the coast for some part of its length. One drives through Cascano, across the valley of the Garigliano, past Minturno on its hilltop, and then on along the coast through Scauri and Formia. There the road branches right through the hills to Itri and Fondi, and swings south-west again past a series of lakes until it touches the coast at the little seaside town of Terracina. Far away to the left, right on the coast overlooking the sea, is the dominating 1,800-foot hummock of Monte Circeo, up which the Germans dragged guns with which they sometimes fired on the convoys going to Anzio. From Terracina the highway turns north-west over the reclaimed Pontine Marshes, with their regularly spaced and uniform little red and white farms, and on, through all that remains of Cisterna, at the junction of the road from Anzio, to Velletri and Rome.

From Naples to Rome the distance by both roads is about 150 miles, and the long strip of country between "Route 6" and the sea saw some of the hardest fighting in Italy, if not of the war.

At the time we made the journey, the country over the first



part of both routes had begun to recover. All the bridges had been blown by the retreating enemy. Some had been replaced by temporary wooden structures or Bailey bridges erected by Army engineers, though occasionally we found ourselves bypassing bridges and splashing axle-deep through the muddy bed of a river. Many of the houses in the roadside villages were little more than heaps of blasted rubble, while others were roofless or sadly battered. Every wall, each building, was scarred and pitted by shell or bomb splinters or bullets.

But Nature was gradually coming into her own. The fields were lush and green, and the grapes were being gathered by men on ladders from the vines strung high between the poplars. Beneath the vines one saw the fruit being trodden out in wooden troughs by the bare feet of tattered-looking small boys and girls, and the juice running down into large and very dirty casks. Flies abounded. Each village, apparently, had its own local brew, and one was told that all impurities vanished during the process of fermentation. Perhaps; but we never dared to do more than sample the harsh yellow or reddish liquid they offered in the wayside hovels labelled *Vino*. The local brandy, distilled from the grape skins that remained after the juice had been expressed, was probably more dangerous still.

The Italian peasantry must be among the most resilient people in the world. Except where the fighting had been prolonged into pitched battles, they had worked on while the tide of battle surged over them and their houses were converted into ruin. And here they were, men, women and children, labouring in the fields, ploughing, planting and hoeing. They lived in what remained of their houses, or in home-made huts and shanties built of corrugated iron, packing cases, ammunition boxes, sacking or camouflage material bartered or stolen from the Army. Laden farm carts, drawn by the plodding white oxen, starveling horses or the brisker, trotting little donkeys, were thick on the roads. One saw fowls, goats, sheep, a few turkeys and geese, with dogs innumerable. It seemed a miracle how the edible birds and animals had survived; but there they were. The people in the villages,

though friendly enough, had a hunted, furtive appearance. Only the mild-eyed oxen looked really placid and undismayed. All the same, for those first miles the country life was gradually returning to normal.

It was on the northern route, some distance short of Cassino, that one really began to notice the devastation. Except for a few people lurking in the ruins, the shattered villages were deserted. Bombed and burnt-out tanks and vehicles lay rustily by the roadside. Most of the trees were shorn and splintered, and here and there were the isolated graves of hastily-buried Allied or enemy dead, the latter easily distinguishable by their black wooden crosses with the Iron Cross and swastika. There were muddy weapon pits with piles of empty cartridge cases, some of them still containing destroyed field and machine guns. There were dumps of evil-looking fuzed shell with red noses, and piles of grenades and bombs, mostly German. Belts of live machine-gun cartridges lay half-buried in the mire, with masses of tangled barbed wire and miles of sagging, disused telephone cable looped between posts and trees and sometimes trailing on the roadway. It was unsafe to investigate. Every few hundred yards there were conspicuous red-lettered notices: "Mines cleared 20 feet each side of roadway."

The destruction increased as we came near once thriving Cassino, lying on the Garigliano at the base of a line of steep hills and dominated by the monastery which, though bombed and blasted into a pitiful heap of pale rubble, had been held for weeks by the enemy fighting with fanatical courage among the ruins. Approaching, one saw lower down what looked like a large cream-coloured stone quarry carved out of the dark, forbidding-looking hillside. Soon one was confronted by large notices: "Don't stop. Remain on the road. Area thick with mines and booby traps."

What looked like a quarry at a distance soon resolved itself into the remains of thickly clustered houses, shattered by bombs and shell into great heaps of stone and mud and protruding rafters, with the jagged remains of blackened walls

standing up out of the rubble. One had seen much bomb damage in England and Naples, but nothing to equal this. Italian houses are more friable than the British, and, apart from being bombed and shelled, practically every house in Cassino had been a strong-point or machine-gun nest won only after fierce hand-to-hand fighting with the hand grenade, tommy-gun and bayonet. The dead lay thick and rotting among the ruins. There was an unwholesome, sweetish smell in the air, which was not altogether disguised by the tang of the strong disinfectant with which they regularly sprayed the rubble on each side of the roadway. Everywhere there were notices: "Beware Mines." "Booby Traps."

For the next seventy or eighty miles, almost into Rome itself, there was evidence enough of the hurried German retreat—more wrecked villages, many more graves by the roadside with their rough white or black crosses, more piles of discarded ammunition, all the indescribable waste and litter of war. There were many deep, water-filled bomb or shell craters, with broken and rusted tanks or motor vehicles every hundred yards. Rome, clean and untouched by strife, its churches and statues intact, its shops filled with luxury goods at exorbitant prices, and its streets teeming with well-dressed Italian men and women and Allied troops on leave, presented a violent contrast to the ravaged, largely depopulated stretch of country through which we had passed.

Cassino will always remain in my memory. I can never forget the blasted town or those stark, sombre hills over which the men of the Allied Army fought and struggled and finally conquered.

I shall also remember battered Anzio and its beaches and tiny harbour, which I visited when it was still invested, and some of the other towns along the southern highway, "Route 7." Cisterna, a key point and road junction which saw much hard fighting before and during the break-out from Anzio beachhead, was a hideous shambles. So was Terracina, a pleasant little seaside town which, since it lay on the main road, had been heavily bombed from the air and bombarded from

the sea. We ate our sandwich lunch to the west of the town on an esplanade overlooking the sandy beach and the sea, with the hump of Monte Circeo ten miles away to the westward. The Germans had evidently expected a landing, for the beach was thickly mined and obstructed by barbed wire entanglements, and the esplanade itself lined with weapon pits and concrete pill-boxes all with a clear field of fire. Behind us was what remained of a long row of expensive-looking villas, each in its own garden. They were the summer-houses of the rich from the cities; but every one of them had been laid in ruin, partly by Allied bombardment, partly by the Germans in order to obtain a clear field of fire for their artillery in case of a landing.

Fondi and Itri were just as pitiful, with their ragged, emaciated people living hand-to-mouth among the ruins. Formia, on the coast further east, with its tall bamboo screen along the road to prevent the traffic being seen from the sea, was even worse. How many times it was bombarded I know not; but the devastation was frightful.

I remember other places, particularly a small village cemetery outside Cancelli, on the Volturno, where the graves of a dozen or more dead of English county regiments were being tended by the Italians long after our troops had gone. I noticed the little bunches of fresh flowers in old corned-beef tins. One came across these little collections of British dead in many places, with here and there the isolated graves of men buried on the battlefield. For years to come, too, the peasants will be ploughing up unexploded shell and hand grenades. Exploring the country within easy driving distance north of Naples, one frequently came across discarded guns and vehicles half hidden in the undergrowth, with occasional piles of ammunition. Many of the sandy beaches were still mined, as four people in a jeep once discovered during the bathing season. The vehicle was blown up and two of its passengers killed.

We too have suffered in Britain. Many of our people have been killed and wounded. Our cities and towns and villages, our churches and monuments, have been bombed and laid

waste. But passing both ways over this Italian countryside I could not help comparing it in my mind with that stretch of pleasant green and wooded land which lies between the main roads from London to Portsmouth, and London to Southampton. It is as though every town and village on these two routes had been bombarded and fought for hand-to-hand, and the country intervening turned into a scarred battle ground.

We have all seen and experienced the misery and the destruction and desolation of war. But we have been spared the supreme horror of all—invasion and that desperate fighting in our towns and villages which spares nothing. We have much for which we may thank God and be humbly grateful.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ADRIATIC  
JANUARY-JULY, 1944  
THE U-BOAT CAMPAIGN

I

REFERENCE has already been made to the light coastal craft of the Royal Navy, which had been based on the island of Vis in October, 1943, for operations among the Dalmatian Islands. During the last two months of the year their constant raids on the schooners and lighters carrying supplies to and fro between the islands and along the coast had become a serious annoyance to the enemy. The intensification of their activities in the first six months of 1944 converted this series of pinpricks into a malignant and incurable ulcer.

The island garrisons could only be supplied by sea, and the convoys were never safe. In the daytime they were spied upon and harried by aircraft. Night after night, whenever the weather served, M.T.Bs. and M.G.Bs. took further toll of the precious cargoes destined for the outlying German garrisons. The work was always dangerous and exciting, and the laconic announcement in the naval communiqués gave no idea of what was really happening. Statements such as, "In the course of the last few nights British light coastal craft operating among the Dalmatian Islands captured three schooners carrying enemy supplies. Their crews were made prisoners," left much to the imagination. Here, then, are the full stories of two typical forays carried out in the spring of 1944.

On a dark, moonless night two M.G.Bs. were on patrol in the inner channels among the thickly clustered islands. The men were closed up at their guns. Any black shape might be either a dangerous rock or an enemy ship, while what looked

like a clump of innocent bushes along the ridge of some small island might well turn out to be a hostile battery.

Our boats were keeping close inshore under the dark shadow of the land when they suddenly became aware of a blurred shape approaching from seaward. Presently they saw the glimmer of a bow wave; then the graceful hull and two masts of a schooner, a vessel several times larger than the M.G.Bs. She came on, and was soon within easy range, virtually a sitting target.

Was it right, however, to destroy so fine and useful a craft, the senior officer asked himself. If she opened fire, of course, the M.G.Bs. must reply; but for the moment the schooner showed no signs of having seen anything unusual. So the senior officer decided upon other tactics. He passed the order, "Stand by to board," to his consort. Starting out from their lurking-place, the engines of both M.G.Bs. roared out into full speed, and before the schooner could even alter course they had crashed alongside.

A boat hanging outboard from the schooner's davits took the brunt of the collision. Broken planks, thwarts and oars filled the air. Men could be heard shouting; but armed seamen swarmed over the schooner's rails, down into the well-decks, and into the cabin-houses and engine-room. The German guards, taken completely by surprise, never fired a shot and were soon made prisoners. The Italian crew were not at all displeased at the capture. To them a prisoner-of-war camp was better than serving their German masters.

A prize crew was put on board, and the next morning the schooner was proudly brought into the harbour at Vis, with the White Ensign fluttering high above the black swastikas painted on her hull. Deck load and cargo were soon investigated. They included well over 100 tons of hay and oats, with a quantity of food. The fodder could ill be spared by the Germans, since in the islands they depended almost entirely on horse transport and their feeding was always a difficulty. The other food, too, included ten tons of butter, which was divided up among many Allied messes. Butter was a rarity in

Italy in those days. The schooner herself was a 250-tonner in perfect condition. Recommissioned and armed as a ship-of-war, she was soon engaged in carrying weapons and supplies to the Allied forces engaged in the liberation of Yugoslavia.

But not all the patrols were so bloodless. On a night in May another mixed unit of M.G.Bs. and M.T.Bs. was operating among the islands within a mile of an enemy-occupied harbour. Their presence was discovered by the enemy early in the night, but beyond showing some warning flares the Germans did nothing. As it was bright moonlight, the British senior officer decided it was no use sitting a mile off the enemy's doorstep if the Germans knew it, so he moved off and stopped about four miles down the coast, where he could still keep an eye on the approach channels. For an hour and a half they waited. Nothing happened. Meanwhile the moon had set and the visibility was very poor.

Our boats were just about to move off to another likely hunting ground when they suddenly saw some dim black shapes moving silently along close inshore. Another twenty minutes would see that convoy safe in harbour and under cover of the batteries. Our men were already at action stations. Word was passed down the line, and, increasing to full speed, the British swung in to attack. They had been seen, for at the same moment the enemy also increased speed and made towards the shore. But they were not fast enough. With their engines roaring all out, our craft were soon within 100 yards, to open fire with every gun that would bear.

By this time the enemy's force had been identified as several lighters normally used for carrying troops and war material. They were fast and very low in the water; built of steel and heavily armed with cannon and machine guns. Concentrating on the largest, a vessel about 100 feet long, our craft swept her from stem to stern with a torrent of bursting shell. Her hapless crew had no chance to retaliate before their vessel was left a blazing, sinking wreck.

The leading British boat engaged at 50 yards range, hitting repeatedly. The distance dropped to 40 yards, and finally to



10, with our guns blazing. Then the Germans opened fire, and at such a range neither side could miss. The M.G.B. was hit again and again before the enemy "opened up like a sardine tin" and her guns were silenced.

The M.G.B. had to withdraw to deal with a serious fire in one of her gun turrets, leaving the now helpless lighter to be finished off by the others. This was done, and the British flotilla concentrated and made for home, with the leader still blazing furiously. While the fire was dealt with on one side of the deck, two men slightly wounded in the leg were bandaged on the other. By sheer good fortune, our boats sustained no further casualties or damage. Well satisfied, they arrived at Vis soon after the calm dawn to chalk up another two enemy losses on the score board.

Life in these small craft was a piratical sort of existence, full of excitement and danger. After their months of hazard, one noticed that some of the men showed signs of strain and weariness, looking much older than their years, which was normally in the early twenties. They had their regular periods of rest in harbour; but sleepless nights of nosing around the islands were bound to have their effect. They could never relax on patrol. There was always the physical discomfort and the feeling of suspense. Their battles, when they came, came suddenly—fierce, high-speed scurries in the midst of a welter of smoke and gun flashes, with the shell and bullets hissing into the water, vari-coloured streams of tracer criss-crossing through the darkness, and above all the roar of engines and the thud and rattle of gunfire. A wrong order to the helmsman, the least hesitation or the slightest error in judgment might spell disaster.

Some of the officers in those little ships may have been yachtsmen before joining the Navy. But the bulk of them, like their men, had hardly seen the sea before the war began. They came from every walk of life, and from every profession, and many from the Dominions. Their courage and determination need not be extolled by me. The proof of their gallantry lies in their records. Amateurs they may have been in September,

1939; but hardened and experienced after more than four years of war, they were now prime seamen and masters in the art and instinct of fierce, inshore fighting.

## II

Destroyers were still busy in the Adriatic—the *Troubridge* and *Termagant*, *Tumult*, *Tenacious*, *Teazer* and *Tyrian*, the *Bicester*, *Ledbury*, *Eggesford* and *Lauderdale*. Sometimes they were used in support of the Eighth Army working up the east coast of Italy or for mopping up the enemy's coastal traffic, though more often they were employed for bombardments of the German-held ports in the Dalmatian Islands. Hvar and Korcula, not far from Vis, received frequent attention in support of raids by the partisans, while further south the enemy-occupied ports of Bar and Ulcinj, together with enemy transport on the coast road near Valona, in Albania, were all shelled.

The first fortnight in June saw two night bombardments of Lussinpiccolo, to the south-east of Pola, where the Germans had established a small naval base for explosive motor-boats. On the night of June 16th-17th, too, the large French destroyers *Le Fantasque* and *Le Terrible*, while making a sweep in the Adriatic, met and engaged an escorted convoy. At least one enemy vessel was blown up.

## III

Some fifty U-boats had been operating in the Western Mediterranean at the time of the North African campaign. They had caused some loss among the Allied convoys, though, considering all the circumstances, the casualties were not so heavy as might have been expected. Most of the convoy routes were covered by shore-based aircraft of Coastal Command of the Royal Air Force, whose potent co-operation with the escort and hunting forces of surface craft was a constant menace to the U-boats and resulted in very severe loss to the enemy.

By one means or another five Italian and two German U-boats were accounted for during the Sicilian operations in July and August, 1943. By the end of September, after Italy's surrender, some twenty-nine Italian submarines had passed into Allied control, while more than eighty had been destroyed or captured in all areas since Italy's entry into the war in June, 1940.

October and November, 1943, saw a great volume of Allied shipping in the Mediterranean, some of the convoys passing through to the Suez Canal on their way further east, others moving to and fro between Gibraltar and the ports in North Africa, Sicily and Italy. The U-boats had sustained a heavy setback in the Atlantic. With its many tempting targets, the Mediterranean seemed a profitable field to Admiral Dönitz and the German U-boat command. Submarines, some of them commanded by the best captains, were ordered to make the hazardous passage through the Straits of Gibraltar, strongly patrolled though it was by surface forces and aircraft. A few made the passage in safety; but more were destroyed.

On one occasion a U-boat on passage through the Straits had been attacked, but managed to struggle through into the Mediterranean. However, the damage was so severe that her crew were forced to abandon ship in their rubber dinghies, whence they were eventually rescued by a Spanish fishing craft. The Spaniard was sighted by a patrol vessel, which closed to investigate. The curiosity of the British commanding officer was aroused by some rubber dinghies towing astern of the fisherman, and a large number of men on deck wearing yellow "Mae West" lifebelts. They were under a neutral flag; but the fisherman was outside territorial waters.

One wishes one had all the details of the negotiations and the fury of the U-boat's crew, but the British C.O. behaved with all the astuteness of Captain Hornblower. He insisted upon saving the "ship-wrecked mariners." At least he carried a surgeon-lieutenant, and some of the poor men must require medical attention.

By November, 1943, there were about fifteen U-boats in

the Mediterranean, and their tenure of life was precarious in the extreme. If one of them attacked a convoy, the whole area was flooded day and night by relays of aircraft, with surface forces standing by to give the *coup-de-grâce* the moment the U-boat appeared. She must eventually come to the surface to charge her batteries and replenish her air. One such incident occurred off the North African coast.

The Germans had invented a new acoustic torpedo, popularly known as the "Gnat." Once discharged, it picked up and followed the sounds of fast-moving propellers, usually the turbine-driven propellers of one of the escort craft. The general idea of the enemy was to eliminate the escorts, which would leave the convoy unprotected and more or less at the mercy of the U-boat. However, annoying though the "Gnats" undoubtedly were, and difficult to counter, things did not always work out as the ingenious enemy expected.

In the early hours of December 12th one of the escorts to a convoy not far from Bougie was torpedoed by U-593 with one of these new weapons. The damaged ship reached Algiers; but soon after 7 a.m. a destroyer, H.M.S. *Tynedale*, was torpedoed and sunk in the same neighbourhood. H.M.S. *Holcombe* and the American destroyer *Niblack* were hunting the U-boat, and H.M.S. *Calpe*, with U.S.S. *Wainwright* and *Benson* were ordered to join and help in the search. Aircraft of Coastal Command were sent out in relays to swamp the whole area in which the submarine might appear; but there were no signs of her on the surface.

Soon after 3 p.m. one of the hunters, H.M.S. *Holcombe*, was torpedoed and sunk, which gave a fresh point of departure for the search. However, the U-boat was well handled. Remaining obstinately submerged, she still managed to evade serious attack. Aircraft, however, were still scouring the neighbourhood in relays and working by plan. Evening came, and the short twilight faded into night. Still there were no signs of the submarine on the surface. Then, soon after midnight on the 12th-13th, a Wellington of Coastal Command suddenly picked up a U-boat with her radar. The aircraft

promptly switched on her searchlight and attacked with machine guns. The damage was not fatal, but it caused U-593 to crash dive. Finally, at 2.30 p.m., the *Wainwright* and *Calpe* located the enemy with their asdics and attacked. Forced to the surface, U-593 was destroyed by gunfire. Since her attack on the *Tynedale* thirty-two hours before, she had only been able to spend a few minutes on the surface. Her batteries were nearly run down and the air inside the boat very foul. Thanks to the new method of swamping the whole area by aircraft and their excellent co-operation with the surface ships, that U-boat was hunted to exhaustion.

It was the same with various others, and the tale of U-boat losses in the Mediterranean was reflected in the diminution of merchant ship sinkings. Whereas in the three months July, August and September, 1943, the Allies had seventeen ships sunk, the last quarter of the year saw the loss of only eight. This was all to the good, though it meant no relaxation in our counter-measures or in the strength of our convoy escorts.

As at Salerno, in September 1943, the U-boats made no really determined attempt to interfere with the large concentration of shipping used during the Anzio landing in January, 1944. Possibly they may have been caught by surprise. Alternatively, our defence was very strong.

However, U-boats were in the area north of Sicily during March, for on the 10th of that month U-450 was sunk some thirty-five miles south-west of Anzio after a hunt in which U.S.S. *Madison*, H.M.S. *Exmoor*, *Blankney* and *Blencathra*, with Wellingtons and Hudsons of Coastal Command, all took part. It was at this time, too, that the U-boat base at Toulon was being heavily bombed by American Liberators, no fewer than 122 aircraft being used for one devastating attack.

A tragedy was to occur on March 30th. A submarine had been located on the convoy route north-east of Palermo, and was hunted by the destroyers *Laforey*, *Tumult*, *Blencathra* and *Hambleton*. The long search was conducted by Captain H. T. Armstrong of the *Laforey*, and went on day and night for many hours. Twenty-two depth-charge attacks were made, and

U-223 was severely damaged and forced to the surface at night. She tried to escape, but before being destroyed fired a torpedo which struck the *Laforey*, exploding one of her magazines. The *Laforey* sank with a loss of ten officers and 172 men. The gallant Captain Armstrong, affectionately known to his friends as "Beaky," and one of the most capable and brilliant young captains of his seniority who had greatly distinguished himself during the war, was not among those saved. His was a great loss to the Royal Navy and to those many of us who knew and loved him.

By April no more than about five U-boats were still operating in the Mediterranean, and toll continued to be taken. On May 3rd, off the North African coast, a U-boat was hunted and finally sunk by H.M.S. *Blankney*, U.S.S. *Sustain*, and the French destroyers *L'Alcyon* and *Senegalais*. Another submarine, U-453, based upon Pola, was sunk on May 21st to the southward of the Gulf of Taranto after being hunted for two days by the destroyers *Tenacious*, *Termagant* and *Liddesdale*, with aircraft.

To anticipate, September, 1944, saw the elimination of the last two operational U-boats in the Mediterranean, with the result that it was soon possible to substitute single-ship sailings instead of the escorted convoys.

## CHAPTER XV

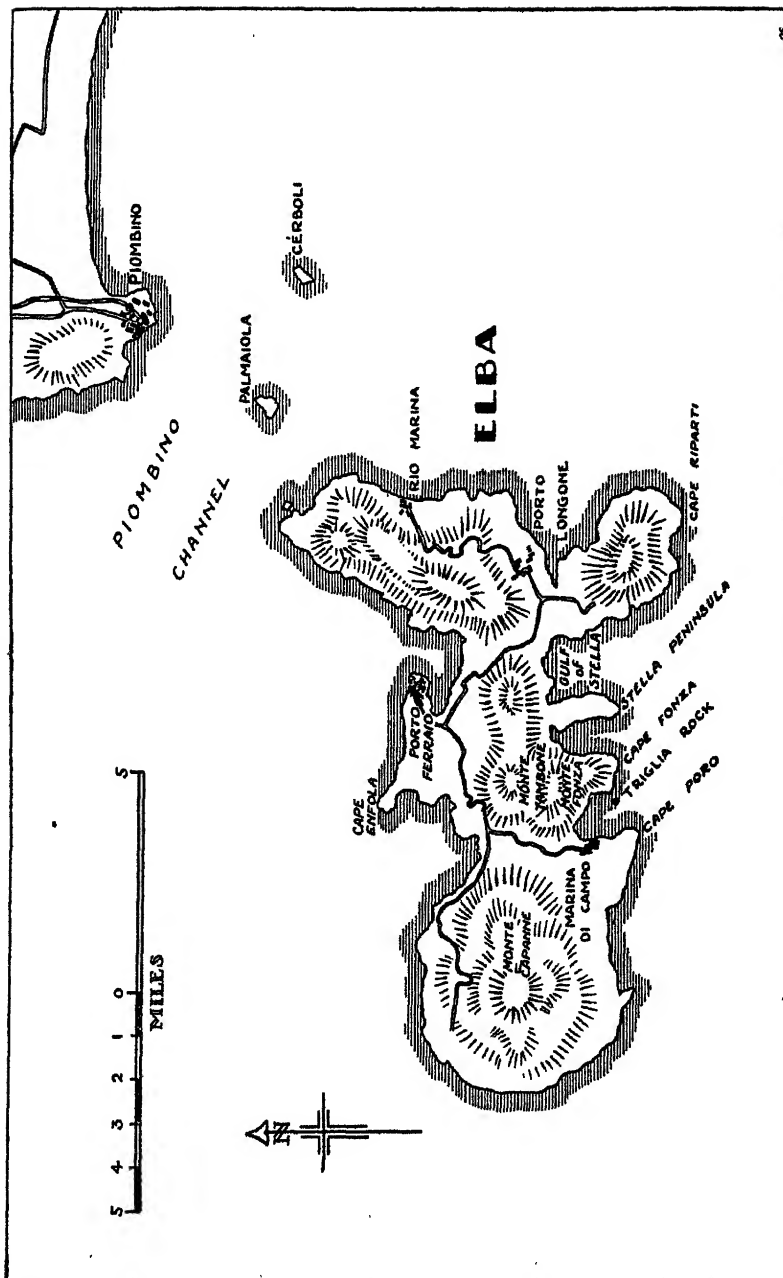
THE ASSAULT ON ELBA. OPERATION  
"BRASSARD"

## I

ROME had been occupied on June 4th, 1944, and, without halting, the Allied Armies crossed the Tiber and pressed on to the north in pursuit of the retreating enemy. By June 17th the inland towns of Arezzo and Siena, with the port of Leghorn, were all in Allied hands.

Leghorn, though badly damaged and sabotaged by the Germans, was of importance for the supply of the Army. But fifty miles down the coast to the southward lay the Italian island of Elba, which still had its garrison of nearly 3,000 Germans well supplied with artillery. At its nearest point Elba is separated from the mainland by the six-mile width of the Piombino Channel, a waterway which had long been used by the enemy supply convoys moving down the coast, and in which, as described, Allied light coastal craft, sometimes working with L.C.Gs., had frequently been in action with considerable success. The channel was now required for use by Allied ships and craft carrying military stores and supplies to Leghorn from Naples and the south. However, it was commanded by the guns of Elba, added to which the island was a convenient base for gunboats or motor craft. Such a stronghold close on the flanks of our convoy route was a menace which could not be permitted to exist.

Plans had already been made for an assault upon Elba by the 9th French Colonial Infantry Division of Tunisian, Algerian and Moroccan troops. General de Lattre de Tassigny was in supreme command. The land forces were commanded by General Henri Martin, and Rear-Admiral Thomas H.



**ELBA.**



Troubridge was the Naval Commander of the mixed force of British and American landing craft and British support craft detailed for the assault. Aircraft were to co-operate by "softening" certain of the defences just before the attack.

The capture of this small, rugged island, some fifteen miles long east and west, was no more than a little side-show in the huge panorama of the war. To the actual participants, however, it was something much more than that. The defences were strong and the landing was fiercely contested, and it was the first time that French native troops, led by their white officers, were to carry out an opposed assault from the sea.

Elba was only taken after fifty-five hours of desperate fighting, in which the French lost some 800 killed and wounded. The Royal Naval casualties were 123, of which sixty-five officers and men were killed. Of the German garrison some 500 were killed, and 1,800, including wounded, made prisoners. Only a few of the enemy, including the General in command, succeeded in escaping to the mainland under cover of darkness.

## II

The plan of attack was roughly as follows: The main assault, preceded by minesweepers, was timed to take place at 4 a.m. on June 17th on the beaches at the head of the Golfo di Campo, with its village of Marina di Campo, on the southern side of the island. The little gulf, about a mile deep and the same distance wide at its entrance, was overlooked on the west by cliffs and the summits of Monte Poro and Monte Cenno, both over 500 feet high, and on the east by similar cliffs running steeply up the Monte Fonza, nearly 1,000 feet high, and Monte Tambone, more than 1,200.

Both the sea approaches and the main landing beach were commanded by the coastal batteries and more guns among the hills inland. These could bring a heavy, concentrated fire to bear on any given point. It was to neutralize these batteries, to capture some of the more prominent features, and to mislead the enemy as to where the main assault was coming that

subsidiary landings at various points were to be made at 1 a.m., together with noisy demonstrations by British and American light coastal craft.

Simultaneously, the small island of Pianosa, some eight miles to the southward of the western end of Elba and known to contain a small German garrison, was to be dealt with by French troops. They were to be landed from two French submarine-chasers and two old American destroyers specially altered and fitted for the transport of Commando troops. It may here be said that the enemy garrison was withdrawn from Pianosa shortly before the operation took place, so that the landing there was unopposed.

The minesweeping ahead of the assault was in charge of Commander C. H. Corbet-Singleton, H.M.S. *Rinaldo*, senior officer of the 19th Minesweeping Flotilla, which also normally included the *Antares*, *Arcturus*, *Aries*, *Brave*, *Rosario*, *Spanker* and *Waterwitch*. With the fleet sweepers were four Greek-manned British yard minesweepers, some minesweeping whalers, and minesweeping motor launches. As one report says: "The success of the minesweeping approach was, in great measure, due to the skill displayed and initiative shown by the minesweeping M.Ls. ahead of the 19th Minesweeping Flotilla. These boats, Numbers 555, 556 and 557, were led by the senior officer, 31st M/S M.L. Flotilla, Lieutenant-Commander J. I. Lloyd, R.N.V.R., in M.L. 555."

The sweepers established an eighteen-mile swept channel from a point south of Pianosa Island to Campo Bay in Elba, lit every one and a half miles by dan buoys. Forty-two mines were cut. Before the troops were landed Lloyd's three M.Ls. carried out a search in the assault area. They came under heavy fire, and only a well-laid smoke-screen saved them from heavy casualties.

Our losses through German mines were one L.C.F. (Landing Craft, Flak) sunk, and one L.C.G. damaged.

The supporting and bombarding force consisted of the three old British gunboats, *Cockchafer*, *Aphis* and *Scarab*, with L.C.Gs. 8, 12, 14 and 19. For close support inshore before and during the assault were five L.C.T.(R.), tank-landing

craft fitted for firing rockets, in addition to some L.C.S. (Landing Craft, Support).

### III

A force under the command of Captain Errol Turner, who was Senior Naval Officer, Landings, or S.N.O.L., had been detailed to carry out certain of the subsidiary landings on the south coast of Elba. Turner himself was on board L.C.H. (Landing Craft, Headquarters) 315, which, shortly before two o'clock on the peaceful afternoon of June 16th, "fumbled and cursed her way out of Bastia." Her port engine was out of action, and with "everybody in the worst of tempers, she went to form up her group to lead it to the assault on Elba."

It was a hot, windless day, with hardly a ripple on the water. There was a haze over the sea to the eastward, which shut out all sight of the mountains of Elba, some thirty-five miles distant. It was more of a blessing than otherwise. They hoped it would hold and prevent prying Germans with telescopes on the 3,343-foot summit of Monte Campanne, the highest point in the island, from sighting the converging flotillas of landing craft creeping like water-beetles across the brilliant blue floor of the sea.

Soon after three o'clock, as Turner says, "all was peace." Both engines of L.C.H. 315 were functioning as they should, and the conglomeration of landing and other craft had sorted themselves out into a compact little convoy. There were five L.C.I.(L.) (Landing Craft Infantry, Large), each filled with troops and each towing two of the small L.C.A. (Landing Craft, Assault). Eight motor launches each towed an L.C.A. or L.C.S. In addition, there were two harbour defence M.Ls., two American P.T. boats and three British M.T.Bs.

Just before 5 p.m. the convoy was joined by a P.T. boat and L.C.Gs. 12 and 19, while about an hour later they sighted the masts of four American L.S.T. and the gunboat *Aphis* to the southward. Soon afterwards there was news that two or three enemy F-lighters, moderately fast and heavily armed, might be coming out from Elba to evacuate the garrison of Pianosa. As they must pass close to Captain Turner's convoy while it

lay stopped off Elba landing troops, the *Aphis* was ordered to join him as extra protection.

The voyage continued, and by 8.30 p.m. Elba was well in sight. It would not be dark for some hours, and a few minutes before nine o'clock they saw the first signs of warlike activity on the island, which may have been a bombing raid to "soften" the defences. "There was a large explosion in the direction of Campo Bay," where the main assault was to take place, "and from then on during the rest of the passage we watched explosions, flares, fires and lights all behaving in a quite unaccountable way."

The convoy carefully kept clear of a newly-declared mine-field, only to discover later that while doing so they had passed over another. It was as well they did not know at the time "that only a foot or so beneath those fragile hulls, swaying gently in the wash of our screws as we skimmed over them, lay the most frustrated mines in all the Mediterranean."

It should have been dark by 11 p.m., but was still too light to be pleasant. Elba was eight and a half miles away and Pianosa only four. Both looked uncomfortably close. However, as darkness came a lighted dan buoy was laid in a prearranged spot to serve as a guide to the other convoys, and at 11.15 p.m. H.D.M.Ls. 1301 and 1254 were in position and showing lights towards the sixteen L.C.As. busy loading their troops from the L.C.I.(L.) and M.Ls. The soldiers of the French *Battalion de Choc*—or Commando troops, as we should call them—"piled in in record time."

At 11.38 p.m. H.D.M.L. 1254 (Lieutenant T. B. Beard, R.N.V.R.), taking station ahead of her seven L.C.As. laden with troops, moved silently off towards the Stella Peninsula, some three miles east of the main landing beaches in Campo Bay. The night was very dark, but the bold promontory, with its steep twin peaks and the sea breaking gently along the foot of the sheer cliffs, was soon visible through the darkness. There was no sign of activity on shore. All was quiet, and about half an hour after midnight Beard stopped his engines and told his flight of L.C.As. to go ahead. They disappeared

silently in the darkness, and the troops were landed on each side of the Golfo dell' Acona without incident.

Meanwhile two P.T. boats of the United States Navy were on patrol in the eight-mile gap between Pianosa and Elba. At about 0.20 a.m. they sighted one or two German F-lighters, with, possibly, an E-boat in company, which were probably evacuating the Pianosa garrison. The P.Ts. attacked their greatly superior opponents, and in the short engagement that followed both the American craft were slightly damaged and they had one man killed. It is possible that the F-lighters were also damaged. The streams of coloured tracer fired during this engagement were seen by Rear-Admiral Troubridge in L.C.H. 282, who at that time was some distance to the southward with the convoy for the main assault.

Lieutenant P. W. Spencer, R.N., was on board H.D.M.L. 1301, commanded by Lieutenant F. L. Carter, R.N.V.R. Leading nine L.C.As. and two L.C.Ss., he had left Captain Turner ten minutes before midnight on his way to a beach about two miles west of Campo Bay. From here the troops were to make their way across the rough and hilly country to the east to deal with the enemy batteries, overlooking Campo Bay and the main landing beaches.

Creeping silently on to within 1,800 yards of the dark shore, Spencer, who was in charge of this part of the operation, verified the position, and told Lieutenant R. H. Farey, in charge of the L.C.As., to go on. This was at 0.40 a.m.

Listening to the receding throb of engines, those on board H.D.M.L. 1301, which lay stopped, watched the blurred shapes of the small craft fade away and disappear under the dark shadow of the land. They showed no lights. The night was clear. The sharp peaks of the island lay silhouetted like carved ebony against the deep indigo of the night sky.

The engine noises died away. Except for the faint rippling of water alongside, the hum of the dynamo below and occasional muffled conversation, hardly a sound disturbed the stillness on board the waiting M.L. It was a period of nervous tension. Would those troops be able to land unseen? Ashore

the enemy showed no signs of being on the alert. There were no suspicious-looking lights—nothing. Nevertheless, some twenty minutes before there had come some short bursts of gunfire and streams of tracer bullets away over the sea to the south-westward in the direction of Pianosa.

The minutes passed. Then, at 0.55, those on board the M.L. suddenly saw the glimmer of a bow wave and the dark shape of an approaching vessel about 400 yards on the port bow. Long and low in the water, it looked like an F-lighter. It was. Within a second or two they heard the unmistakable gabble of German voices.

It was an exciting moment. The L.C.As. had not yet touched down on the beach. Since it was vitally important that their troops should land unseen, Spencer hoped that the little M.L. would not be sighted. An order was passed to the guns to train on the enemy and to stand by.

The Germans, however, warned no doubt by their previous encounter with the P.T. boats, were fully on the alert. Within ten seconds of being sighted, the F-lighter opened up a furious fire with heavy and light machine guns. The motor launch retaliated at once, some of her men hearing screams from the enemy as Oerlikon shell swept their decks and burst amidst the eddies of wreathing smoke. The guns thudded and crackled. Streams of red and white tracer shot across the intervening water. Shell, splinters and bullets hissed overhead and spurted into the sea. Many drove home. Before the enemy broke off the engagement to disappear in the direction of Campo Bay, Carter, 1301's commanding officer, was killed on his bridge, and his first lieutenant and five ratings were wounded. Spencer, who was untouched, took over the command, and by the mercy of heaven the M.L. was not seriously damaged.

Farey, on his way in to the beach in charge of the L.C.As., had to alter course to keep clear of the line of fire, some of the "overs" from the F-lighter bursting ashore and setting fire to the brushwood. But the landing craft were not seen by the enemy, and at about 1 a.m. started to touch down at their appointed places and landed their troops without hindrance.

In the pitch darkness those French native soldiers of the *Battalion de Choc* had great difficulty in crossing the very rough and hilly country to the eastward. They had about two miles to go, and by the time the main assault craft were entering Campo Bay had stormed and captured a hill overlooking some of the gun positions. Their presence prevented this battery from playing much of a part during the assault, while they later captured another battery of 40-mm. guns which were causing trouble to the landing craft.

Meanwhile, on the north coast of Elba, a small French detachment under a Lieutenant Jacobsen had been landed according to plan. They attacked the battery near Cape Enfolia with desperate gallantry and destroyed three guns out of four, but suffered very heavy casualties in the process. Then, after being counter-attacked by a greatly superior force, they were all either killed or made prisoners. Jacobsen managed to escape later and to rejoin the French, while another survivor was rescued by the *Cockchafer* on the morning of June 19th.

At about 1 a.m. on the 17th, another small subsidiary landing took place further east on the western side of the Riparti Peninsula, with the idea of capturing the batteries there, while on the north side of the island American P.T. boats under Lieutenant-Commander Douglas Fairbanks, U.S.N.R., simulated a landing in force off the harbour of Portoferrario, which was mined and heavily defended. All these diversionary landings helped to draw off German troops from the main assault area in Campo Bay.

#### IV

Commander H. Duncan, R.N., in L.C.H. 240, Deputy Senior Officer, Landings, had sailed from Bastia with a mixed force of L.C.I.(L.) and M.Ls. towing L.C.As. or L.C.V.Ps. (Landing Craft, Vehicle or Personnel). This convoy had been met at sea by four American L.S.Ts. and five L.C.Ts.(R.), towing smaller craft.

Moving down the channel already swept by the mine-sweepers, they reached their appointed position to the southward

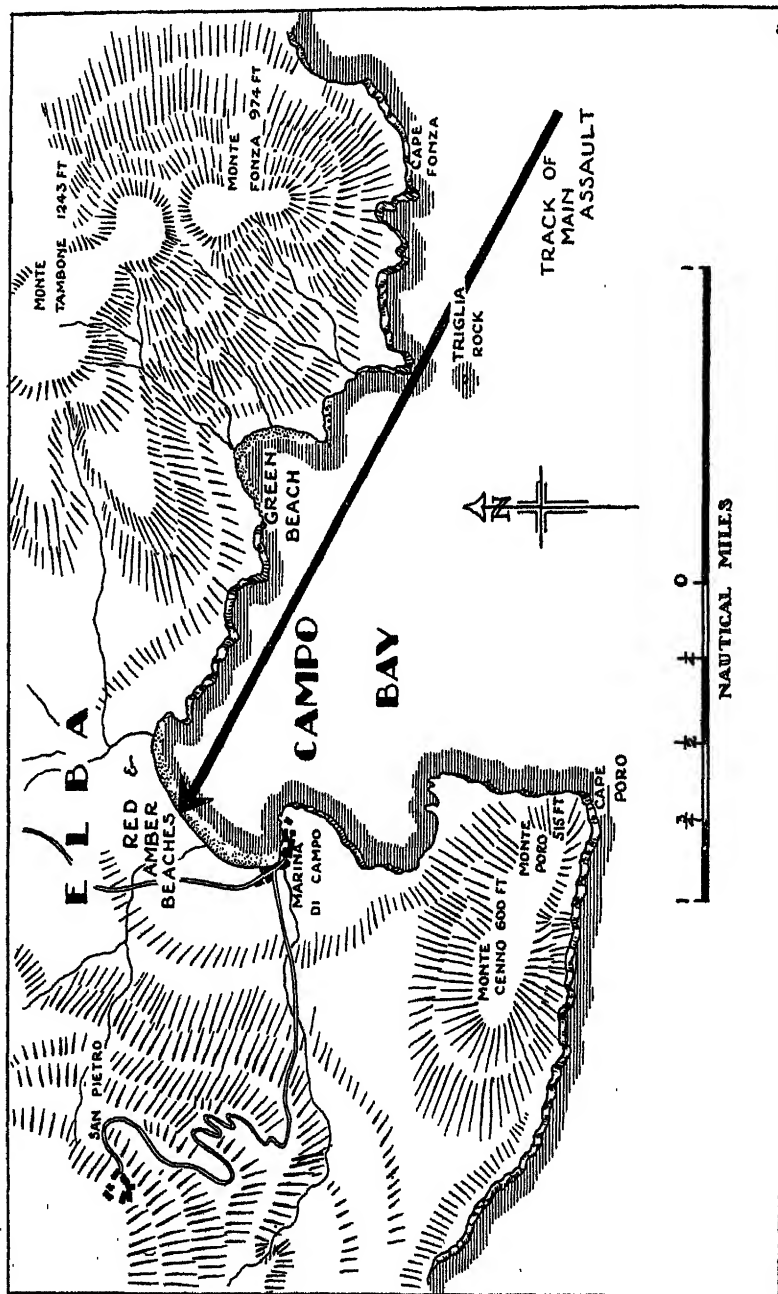
of Elba soon after 2 a.m. and stopped to transfer the troops from the large to the smaller landing craft.

The main assault flight of L.C.As. moved shoreward at slow speed at 2.49, led by Lieutenant-Commander H. D. Davis, R.N.V.R., Squadron Officer, in M.L. 1246. Cape Poro and Cape Fonza, the bold hummocks west and east of the entrance to the Golfo di Campo, were soon in sight, and at 3.34 Davis' flight reached the rock named Scoglio Triglia. The main entrance to the Gulf had been mined, so, passing the rock on its eastern, or shoreward, side he reduced speed. He had a bare mile and a half to travel to the beaches. Five minutes later the battery on the summit of Cape Poro began to challenge with a flashing light. Davis naturally did not reply, and at 3.47 the Cape Poro batteries opened fire, the beach defences and other guns soon chiming in. The first waves of the assault were sent in at once, while the support craft made smoke and engaged inshore targets. Even the L.C.As. opened fire with their Lewis guns, while H.D.M.L. 1246 engaged Cape Poro with her 2-pounder, Oerlikons and twin Vickers.

The roar of battle rose in a crescendo. Spencer, in H.D.M.L. 1301, with fourteen L.C.V.Ps., passed the Triglia rock at about 3.45. Guns were firing from Monte Poro on the west, and the slopes of Monte Fonza on the east. More cannon-fire came from the village of Marina di Campo. "Though many of the bursts seemed close, no craft in the wave was hit," Spencer wrote later. "Later, when the beach was sighted, machine-gun and small arms fire came from the beach area and there were a few casualties in the L.C.V.Ps." A smoke-screen laid by the support craft was invaluable.

The L.C.Ts.(R.), meanwhile, had taken up their positions to seaward, drawing a certain amount of gunfire during their approach. Their rockets, to the number of 4,000, with a total weight of explosive of about 55 tons, were intended to be distributed over the whole length of the landing beach, some 2,000 yards. Most careful timing was necessary, while the rocket craft must know their positions to almost a yard. This part of the operation may not have gone off precisely





ASSAULT UPON ELBA.

according to plan, but the effect was sufficiently startling.

The first rocket craft fired at 3.52 a.m., and the others at short intervals. The sheets of flame with the roar and shattering blast of the many explosions all within four minutes caused consternation to the enemy. "From then on," as says one account, "only some of the cliff subterranean positions and a few machine guns remained in action. All the gun positions in the bay were upset, directly or indirectly, by the rockets."

The first waves of small landing craft, one of which was led by Lieutenant H. A. Picton-Waterlow, R.N.V.R., flotilla officer of the 573rd L.C.A. Flotilla, were creeping in towards the beaches, waiting for the rocket fire to cease. The last of these devastating projectiles fell and exploded at 3.56, after which "there was dead silence for perhaps two minutes, and the whole of one beach and the village of Marina di Campo were shrouded in thick black smoke." There was hardly a house in the village which was not hit.

In the midst of this smoke pall, augmented by the smoke-screens poured out by the support craft, many of the landing craft of the first wave were able to touch down on certain beaches without undue difficulty and to get their troops on shore. But the enemy speedily recovered from the effect of the rockets, and on some of the landing places there was no smoke protection. As they approached, the leading landing craft came under heavy fire from both sides and ahead, and were soon suffering casualties.

One L.C.A., commanded by Sub-Lieutenant A. W. Lindsay, R.N.V.R., was hit in the engine-room and set on fire, her stoker being killed instantly. When Lieutenant F. E. Tyrrell, R.N.V.R., arrived with four L.C.As., he saw Lindsay's craft ablaze on the beach, so touched down to the left of her to avoid being silhouetted. The enemy fire was very heavy and accurate, in addition to which the beach was mined. In spite of losses among the naval personnel, the craft pushed on and touched down, to land all their troops. The assault here was ably supported by Sub-Lieutenant S. R. I. Knox; R.N.V.R., in one of the support craft, who lay off the beach returning the

enemy fire and directing the new arrivals to the landing place until his ship was hit by a 88-mm. shell on the waterline and he was forced to run her ashore.

The sea approaches to the beaches were now completely obscured by smoke. Observation was very difficult, but from the time the enemy first opened fire all the support craft were in hot action. As one eye-witness said of them: "Wherever there was action to be found, there the L.C.S.(M.) would be. They were continually protecting craft with their smoke and without exception they played a really vigorous part."

Lieutenant R. B. Anteney, R.N.V.R., leader of the second wave on another beach, led his L.C.As. in in good formation at about 4.10 a.m. He passed through the thick smoke-screen, immediately to come under heavy fire. Some of his craft were holed by machine-gun bullets; but all the troops were landed.

Two L.C.Ss. were hit by shell or mortar fire, one being sunk. Sub-Lieutenant Lindsay's L.C.A. was burnt out on the beach. But in spite of the losses and the difficulty of the situation, the troops were landed and the assault was pressed forward with courage and dash in the face of heavy fire.

The determination and cold-blooded gallantry of the young officers and men in those small landing craft, making that first assault on a hostile shore, have rarely been surpassed. They were under fire on the way into the bay. Moving on, they groped blindfold through the thick smoke-screen, knowing little of what they might meet the other side. That it was something unusually and terribly grim they could tell from the sounds of gunfire all round them. Yet there was no faltering, no hesitation. Obedient to their orders, they pressed on.

Reports of proceedings written later conveyed nothing of what was felt by the people concerned. They merely gave the bald narrative and stated the more important facts in the most restrained language. Moreover, the Royal Navy is never lavish with its praise. So Captain Errol Turner, who, as has been said, was Senior Naval Officer, Landings, did not write what he did without very good reason: "I wish to state my personal admiration for the way in which all naval personnel under my

orders carried out their duties. There was a noticeable spirit of determination throughout the Force which has been commented on from outside sources."

A simultaneous assault by fourteen American L.C.V.Ps. had been made in a cove about a mile south-east of the beach near Marina di Campo. It was not so heavily opposed as the other landings, though there was a good deal of fire from machine guns, which killed two seamen. No craft were put out of action.

## v

As part of the plan, it had been arranged to capture the heavily-armed enemy F-lighter which was normally moored alongside the mole in the little harbour of Marina di Campo, near the beaches where the main assault was to take place. Known as "Operation Cut-out," it involved a "cutting-out" expedition in the old-fashioned naval style. The craft detailed for the purpose were two L.C.As. normally carried at the davits of the *Royal Scotsman*. Each had twenty-seven officers and men of the Royal Naval Beach Commandos. In charge of the whole party was Lieutenant J. B. Lukin, R.N.V.R., in L.C.A. "Y," commanded by Lieutenant Harland, R.N.V.R. L.C.A. "Z" was in charge of Sub-Lieutenant Flynn, R.N.V.R.

The attack was timed to take place at 4 a.m., simultaneously with the main assault, and "Y" and "Z" were attached to the first flight until close inshore. They waited until all the rockets had fallen, and were then released. They made for the mole at full speed. It was pitch dark, and the village of Marina di Campo was hidden in thick smoke.

The enemy's gunfire reopened as they approached their objective, and just as "Y" was going alongside at 4.4 a.m., she was hit forward by a shell which wounded an officer and two men. Immediately afterwards she grounded on a rock and began to settle a few yards from the mole. Telling his Bren-gunners to follow him, Lukin jumped into the water from the lowered ramp and began to wade towards the beach. In the noise and confusion, his orders were not properly heard, and

it was not until he had gone about 20 yards that he realized he was alone. So he started to return.

The enemy fire had increased. L.C.A. "Z" had also been hit by a shell, with a loss of one killed and three wounded. She managed to claw her way alongside the seaward face of the mole. Hand grenades were lobbed over and on to the mole as arranged, after which the seamen, led by Lieutenant A. B. Hodgson, R.N.V.R., and Sub-Lieutenant E. A. Macdonald, R.I.N.V.R., scaled the wall and attacked the F-lighter on the other side. Enemy opposition was not very serious, and after two or three Germans had been killed at their gun positions, the ship was captured and fourteen prisoners taken. The rest of the enemy crew, it seemed, were taking cover in the air raid shelters on the shore.

Lukin returned, to find that the party from L.C.A. "Y" had managed to transfer themselves to the other landing craft and thence to the mole. Having seen that the enemy F-lighter was captured, he embarked his wounded in L.C.A. "Z" and took them off to a landing craft for medical attention. Harland, meanwhile, with Sub-Lieutenant Griffiths, who had been wounded, had been forced to abandon "Y" with their men, their craft being partially sunk and immovable. Under heavy fire from enemy mortars and machine guns, Harland and his men landed on the mole and took shelter among some rocks near where the jetty met the shore.

It had been agreed with the French assaulting troops that the naval party should not enter the village of Marina di Campo until its defenders had been mopped up. Hodgson therefore organized all the men he could to defend the mole against possible attack from the shore. Bren-gunners covered the approaches, and the F-lighter's 75-mm. gun was manned by British naval ratings. The German prisoners were herded at the seaward end of the mole under guard, while the rest of the naval party were spread out along it. Their concentrated fire was directed at enemy snipers in the ruined houses nearby, and the situation was well in hand.

During the assault several insulated wires had been seen on

the mole, and were duly cut. At about 4.45 a.m., though nobody was keeping any account of the time, enemy heavy guns from the hills to the eastward opened up a heavy fire. The first salvo of shell went over and burst in the village. The second and third landed on or near the seaward end of the mole, detonating two large demolition charges previously placed by the enemy. The explosions blew the end completely off the mole, and made a 30-foot gap some 20 feet from its extremity. But what was much worse, they killed twenty officers and naval ratings who were in the vicinity, blew the stern of the F-lighter away from the mole, and started a fire on board, in which ammunition soon began to explode.

Two British ratings were found dead at the F-lighter's 75-mm. gun. Two other able seamen, who had been lying on the fore-deck of the German ship, were helped ashore down the headropes by Able Seaman C. Woodhall. With the other survivors, they took shelter on the seaward side of the wall.

Lukin, in L.C.A. "Z," after taking off the wounded and picking up some seamen and troops from a landing craft stranded and blazing on the beach, was on his way back to the mole. He was about 400 yards away when the explosions took place, but immediately closed and rescued the survivors. The area was still under very heavy shell fire, and, as one of the reports says, "It is a high tribute to the courage and determination of the surviving members of this party that, despite the fact that the mole was illuminated by the burning F-lighter, all the wounded were got over the wall and rescued from among the dead. Lieutenant Harland was in a large measure responsible for the evacuation."

One man, Able Seaman Ball, who was lying unconscious, was left behind as dead. He was later rescued by Sub-Lieutenant D. Lock, R.I.N.V.R., and Able Seaman M. Slyfield of one of the R.N. Beach Commandos.

Including the two boats' crews, seven officers and fifty-nine ratings took part in the operation. Of these four officers and thirty-one ratings were killed, with eighteen ratings wounded, a total of fifty-three casualties out of the sixty-six present.

That most of the casualties occurred when the demolition charges exploded in no way detracts from the desperate bravery of those who took part in "Operation Cut-out."

In the darkness of the night made blacker still by the clouds of rolling smoke, they found the mole and stormed it. After the short lull caused by the rockets, the roar of battle again broke out from every direction. The thick smoke curtain became fitfully illuminated by the stabbing red gleam of gun flashes and the bright, converging lines of tracer. Shell crashed home and exploded, and the air was filled with bullets and flying fragments.

Yet they did what they set out to do by capturing the F-lighter in the very face of the enemy. The Germans were still in the village of Marina di Campo, a short distance away at the foot of the mole. It was intended that the village should be mopped up by some of the first troops to land, but for some reason the plans went awry, and Marina di Campo was not finally captured until the early afternoon.

Had that F-lighter remained in action, her flanking fire along the 2,000-yard stretch of the main assault beaches would have added incalculably to the difficulties, as well as to the casualties.

It was a most gallant episode. The valour and self-sacrifice of those few officers and men in two small landing craft saved many lives.

## VI

It would be daylight at about 5 a.m., and the first follow-up flights of L.C.I. carrying infantry were timed to touch down at 4.30. The main beach defences had been overrun in the first assault half an hour before, but the Germans were well dug in and had not been mopped up before the first troops passed them and moved on inland. Indeed, the strong beach defences were not finally taken until about noon.

After passing through the thick smoke-screen which now filled the bay to within 100 yards of the shore, the first five L.C.I. of the follow-up flights tried to touch down on the western end of the beach near Marina di Campo at 4.30. The

moment they appeared out of the smoke they at once came under the very heavy and accurate fire of machine guns, 20- and 40-mm. cannon and at least one heavier gun. Four of the craft were hit almost at once; and L.C.I.(L.) 132, which had also been fitted out as a casualty clearing ship, caught fire and sank in shallow water near the beach, in spite of the very gallant efforts of her crew to get her clear. The remaining craft were forced to withdraw, fortunately without serious damage, and finally landed their troops elsewhere, as will be described later.

L.C.I.(L.) 272, commanded by Lieutenant J. D. Keys, R.C.N.V.R., beached at 4.31 and lowered both her ramps. Almost immediately she was hit by a shell in the port side of the well deck, which started a small fire in one of the troop spaces. A second or two later she received another hit which punctured the salt-water system, and the spraying water put out the fire. There was a short lull, during which a few men made their way ashore off the starboard ramp; but the damage on the port side made it impossible for anyone to disembark. As the troops could not get ashore, Keys unbeached and eventually landed the soldiers elsewhere.

Surgeon-Lieutenant J. M. Couchman, R.N.V.R., described what happened in L.C.I.(L.) 132. This ship was about to beach when she was hit forward by four mortar shells in quick succession. She burst into flame, and a large fire took hold rapidly. The first lieutenant and most of the seamen stationed forward, with all the French native troops and their white officers and N.C.Os. standing by to land, were apparently all killed or wounded. The commanding officer left the bridge to go forward to organize the fire-fighting, and was almost instantly hit in the head and mortally wounded. The ship was now fiercely ablaze in Nos. 1 and 2 troop spaces.

Couchman took over the command, and, as there was no chance of landing the remaining troops, decided to withdraw. They managed to haul off the beach, but on going ahead they were driven off the bridge by the flames sweeping over it. The engine-room was filled with smoke, and there was no alternative but to abandon the already sinking ship. The native



troops, who were without lifebelts, could not be persuaded to leave the ship and were placed as far aft as possible.

Another account says: "A magnificent effort was made to save L.C.I.(L.) 132 when she unbeached and came out astern. After unbeaching successfully, her stern swung round and she headed for the quays. Meanwhile the enemy's long-range shelling began, and the last seen of her was an explosion in the well-deck, after which she appeared to lie-to."

The ship sank in two fathoms, and was later raised and towed to Castellamare. Precisely what casualties she suffered on that eventful morning of June 17th I do not know.

Lieutenant R. Crabtree, R.N.V.R., of L.C.I.(L.) 316, who came in with the second flight, said that when he arrived at the point from which he had to turn in to the beach, one of the small support craft was fiercely engaging an enemy gun position, but was hopelessly outgunned. She had laid smoke, which had drifted across the mouth of the bay. The beach at this time "was completely raked by fire. . . . L.C.Is.(L.) 132, 272 and 278 had all been hit and were ablaze."

Had it not been for the excellent work of the support craft—L.C.S.(M.)—who laid smoke and did their utmost in engaging the enemy gun positions, the casualties and damage to the follow-up of L.C.Is. would have been far greater.

Daylight came, and after passing through the smoke-filled bay, Lieutenant R. Armitage, R.N.V.R., of L.C.I.(L.) 314 became aware that everything "had not gone according to plan." He saw an L.C.I. on fire near the beach, and two others which should have touched down were coming away with their troops still on board. Because of the strong enemy defences, which had not been captured, the Marina di Campo beaches could not be used. At 5.20 Armitage was told not to beach until further orders, and the succeeding flights of L.C.Is. were ordered to wait.

But about a mile down the coast south-east of the Marina di Campo beaches was the small cove where the American L.C.V.Ps. had made their successful assault at 4 a.m. The weaker defences there had been captured, so all the further

flights of L.C.Is. were ordered to land their troops in the same spot. It was known as "Green" beach, to distinguish it from the "Red" and "Amber" beaches at Marina di Campo.

Nevertheless, the situation was still difficult. "Green" beach was not extensive, and had many rocks around high-water mark. It was surrounded by high hills, with a steep foreshore covered with scrub and boulders. It had no exits for guns or vehicles, which could not be dragged or driven off the beach or across the very rough country. Infantry could be put ashore rapidly enough in "scramble landings," though once there, there was the difficulty in supplying them with supporting arms and ammunition. No troops could fight on indefinitely with what they carried on them.

More than 1,000 soldiers had already been landed, but the enemy was not yet dislodged from the many strong points around the Marina di Campo beaches. It was vital that the Germans here should be eliminated, for the gently shelving "Red" and "Amber" beaches, with their good exits, were the only places where L.C.Ts. could land guns, vehicles and heavy stores.

By 6.30, and broad daylight, "Green" beach was getting its share of mortar fire, though the landing still continued.

Rear-Admiral Troubridge, in L.C.H. 282, on board of which was the French General Magnan, was cruising a few miles seaward of Cape Poro watching the gunboats engaging the batteries at Cape Riparti, which had not been captured by the small body of men landed there at 1 a.m. Captain Errol Turner, in L.C.H. 315, the Senior Naval Officer, Landings, was not far off, and in contact with the Naval Commander. Both ships, and the other vessels in company, were occasionally being fired upon by the high-velocity guns of the Riparti batteries. From the sea neither Admiral nor S.N.O.L. could see much of the battle ashore, though the constant stream of messages coming through by radio and radio-telephone, and plotted on the charts in their operation-rooms, told them all that was happening. Aware of the hold-up on the "Red" and "Amber" beaches at Marina di Campo, they had already ordered the follow-up flights of L.C.Ts. to land their men on

"Green." The intention was that these troops should advance across country and take the Marina di Campo defences and the village from the flank. The difficulty now was to supply them with ammunition, for they would very soon exhaust what they carried with them.

Three L.C.Ts., 356, 364 and 389, were all laden with pack mules belonging to the French Moroccan Goums. Where men could go the mules could scramble also. Some of the animals carried light mortars in sections. As for the ammunition, this could be laden into Dukws on board the L.C.Ts. which carried them, and the Dukws could swim off to "Green" beach and transfer the reserve ammunition to the mules. Orders to this effect went out at about 8 a.m., and all the mules were safely ashore by 9.45. Before long the laden animals and their drivers were making their way round the bay and up the hillside in rear of the infantry attacking the beach defences and the high ground to the east of them. The ammunition carried by those mules reached the firing line at a very critical time.

Admiral Troubridge describes how, watching from the sea through his binoculars, he saw the tiny black figures of men scrambling up the steep slopes of Monte Tambone, more than 1,200 feet high, which dominated Marina di Campo and the gulf, and many of the surrounding hills and enemy gun positions. The hill, which was required as an observation post for those spotting the gunfire of the British gunboats, had its German observation post and garrison. The position was gallantly captured by the Goums after some bloody fighting in which most of the Germans were killed.

Our bombarding forces consisted of the three old gunboats, *Cockchafer*, *Aphis* and *Scarab* (Lieutenant E. A. Hawkesworth, R.N.V.R.), with L.C.Gs. 8, 12, 14 and 19. Their supporting fire throughout the operation was most effective, their activities in the earlier stages being confined to dealing with coast defence batteries and what inland targets were visible from the sea.

In particular, two batteries at Cape Riparti were bombarded at frequent intervals from 3.55 until 8.45 a.m., and had more than 900 4.7-inch and 100 6-inch shell fired at them. During

most of this time the enemy was retaliating. The L.C.Gs. were straddled and near-missed on many occasions, but came through without damage or casualties. As one eye-witness said, "the action of these craft in presenting themselves as targets at relatively short range to draw the enemy's fire, was the cause of the main body of craft being virtually undisturbed."

Rear-Admiral Troubridge himself noted that the duel between the L.C.Gs. and the battery at Cape Riparti "was most impressive, and the inspiring conduct of L.C.G. 8 (Lieutenant J. R. Pitt, R.N.V.R.), with salvoes falling close round her, closing the range and finally silencing the battery is unlikely to be forgotten by those who witnessed it. As a result, the shipping offshore was not disturbed by more than intermittent shelling."

By 8.45 the Riparti batteries had been silenced, and officers who visited the gun positions later reported them as "pretty well flat."

Two other howitzer batteries, responsible for most of the shell-fire in the beach area, were repeatedly engaged from the sea, receiving more than 330 6-inch shell and many 4.7-inch. Though they were not completely knocked out, "their output," as someone phrased it, "was considerably reduced."

The *Aphis* (Lieutenant E. E. Clifton, R.N.R.), working with a forward observation officer on shore, Captain M. V. C. Firth, R.A., did some fine shooting. On one occasion, against an enemy battery, she had the message: "Very successful work. Lovely shoot." Another time she wrecked a house in use as enemy headquarters with an expenditure of only twenty-eight rounds of 6-inch. The observing officer reported, "Target destroyed," which was literally true. Later inspection showed that one salvo had exploded inside and demolished the entire building.

The observation officers on shore were under heavy and accurate fire and working in conditions of no little danger and difficulty. When directing the naval bombardment, it was never easy to know the positions of the forward troops. Two F.O.Bs., as they were now designated—Forward Observation,

Bombardment—were put out of action by an enemy shell which burst on the parapet of a slit trench they were sharing. Their radio transmitting set was destroyed. One officer and a rating were wounded, and two others had their ear-drums broken by blast.

The battle ashore continued, with more and more troops being landed on "Green" beach. There was much desperate fighting before the beach defences and the village of Marina di Campo were finally stormed and captured by the French between noon and 1 p.m. The tank-landing craft were then ordered in to the "Red" and "Amber" beaches, the first one discharging unmolested at three o'clock. Half an hour later three L.C.Ts. were being received at a time. Desultory shell and mortar fire continued at the eastern end of the beaches until 5 p.m.

The situation was well in hand, and the Navy's task now consisted of landing guns, vehicles and stores as rapidly as possible, clearing the casualties to Bastia, and engaging such batteries as remained in action. It was not until 11 a.m. on June 19th that the survivors of the German garrison surrendered, and Elba passed into the hands of the Allies. Unaccustomed though they were to landing craft, and to a heavily-opposed assault upon an unfamiliar beach at night, the French Colonial troops, led by their white officers and N.C.Os., fought throughout with magnificent dash and bravery. Their *élan* was superb.

The casualties, which were heavy, have already been mentioned, and the high price paid for victory was almost entirely due to the great strength of the enemy's defences, on the beaches chosen for the landings. The assault did not come as a tactical surprise. The Germans had ample time to prepare.

"As for the personnel of the Royal Navy, we may quote the words of Rear-Admiral Troubridge when referring to the assault as a whole: "The young officers and men, both British and American, who carried out the assault under Captain Errol Turner, R.N., behaved in a manner which not only did great credit to themselves, but earned the admiring appreciation of the French Army."

Those young men had never flinched. Once more the seamen of the British and United States had worked and fought together in complete understanding and unity of purpose. Compared with greater events elsewhere, Elba was a bloody little side-show, but those of the British and American Navies who took part in it had once more upheld the tradition of their two great Services.

## VII

At 11.30 a.m. on the day that Elba surrendered, the little gunboat *Cockchafer* nosed her way into Rio Marina Bay on the east coast of the island. Her commanding officer was Lieutenant A. W. Dow of the R.N.V.R., who was anxious to see what was going on and perhaps to mop up any Germans trying to escape. His curiosity was rewarded, for almost at once he saw what looked like a staff car and a lorry filled with troops making north at high speed along the coast road. The gunboat remained in a position with her guns trained to put the road out of action if there were further attempts to escape. In the meanwhile, some German stragglers were seen, together with a lone figure gesticulating wildly on the beach. The *Cockchafer* closed and used her loud-hailer to order any Germans to lay down their arms and to advance to the water's edge. The solitary figure immediately dived into the sea and swam towards the ship. He was rescued, and turned out to be a French soldier, one of the party from the *Battalion de Choc* which had been landed at 1 a.m. on June 17th to destroy the battery at Cape Enfolà. He had been captured, but in the confusion of the fighting had managed to escape. He warned the *Cockchafer* that the Boche was still in the neighbourhood in some strength, and advised her to keep clear of the bay.

By this time, however, the gunboat's motor-boat had been called away to capture two Germans carrying a wounded comrade. This was done, though when the boat was halfway back to the ship fire was suddenly opened from the shore with light machine guns, the *Cockchafer's* decks being raked and many men having narrow escapes. The fire, which came from

the party of troops which had disappeared round a bend in the road in their lorry, was returned by every Oerlikon that would bear. Then four rounds were fired from the foremost 6-inch, which stopped the business for the time being.

However, the motor-boat was no sooner alongside and the prisoners on board than the ship again came under very heavy fire from a battery of eight light guns. They made good shooting, though again there were no casualties. Steaming off out of range, the *Cockchafer* stopped to hoist her boat, and while doing so was fired at by enemy guns from the mainland of Italy near Piombino. Cocking up her 6-inch guns to their full elevation, she let drive in reply. But the guns were old and considerably worn. At such a range it is unlikely that her shell fell anywhere near their target.

However, those were probably the last rounds fired during daylight by the Royal Navy during Operation "Brassard"—fired by a twenty-eight-year-old river gunboat built during the First World War for service in Mesopotamia. The outbreak of the Second World War had found her in China, on the Yang-tse River. From there she had voyaged south to Hong-Kong and Singapore, and across the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean. There, with her sister ships, *Aphis*, *Scarab* and *Ladybird*, she had done good work in many bombardments of enemy positions along the coast of Libya.

Those little old ships, with their patched and leaking hulls, and old-fashioned guns, boilers and machinery, were long past the age when, if it had been peacetime, they would have been broken up. They steamed thousands of miles and were frequently in action, and to their engineers, who had to keep them going, they were holy terrors. It is to the everlasting credit of these men that the gunboats were always ready when wanted. War brought them a new lease of life, and a very useful one. They were regarded, no doubt, as "expendable," nevertheless, as veterans of repute with a fine fighting record.

Though the *Cockchafer's* guns may have been the last to fire on the enemy during daylight in the Elba operations, it was not the last occasion on which the enemy was engaged.

On June 18th the Germans were trying to evacuate troops from the island, and that night light coastal craft operating near the Piombino Channel met and engaged an enemy F-lighter. She was torpedoed and sunk, while the escorting E-boat fled at high speed.

On the 19th, as described, the *Cockchafer* had seen German troops around Rio Marina and on the coast road to the north of it. It was the only highway on the east coast of Elba, and it was from this neighbourhood that the enemy was endeavouring to embark his men for the six-mile passage across the Piombino Channel to the mainland of Italy. But our light coastal craft were waiting and ready, and on the night of June 19th-20th they spotted a convoy of five F-lighters with an escorting E-boat going to the island to evacuate troops. Our craft followed and allowed the lighters to load up, after which they fell upon them and engaged with gunfire and torpedoes. The E-boat disappeared at full speed, but three of the lighters were torpedoed and a fourth probably sunk. The evacuation area was also engaged by gunfire, to which the enemy retaliated. The action lasted in all for ninety minutes, but our craft had no damage or casualties. It is unlikely that many more of the enemy succeeded in escaping by sea.

## VIII

On the day that Elba surrendered a few small landing craft were lying on a beach in a little cove to the north of Cape Poro, where there were some of the enemy batteries for defence at Campo Bay. The crews had been given a few hours off to rest after their exertions. Some of the men were bathing, some sleeping or enjoying the sun. It was a beautiful, balmy day. All was peace.

Suddenly down a rough pathway leading from the heights above came a figure in field grey uniform, a German officer. The nudist colony below stared in amazement. Someone rushed for a Tommy-gun and levelled it, shouting to the German to halt, to hold up his hands. The orders were obeyed.

One can imagine the interview that followed as the



half-naked, sunburned sailors clustered and goggled round their prisoner. He was newly shaved and immaculate, with well-polished top boots and a brand-new cap and uniform with the usual eagle and swastika badges. A British officer, undistinguishable from his men, demanded to know who the German was. The Nazi, who knew a little English, said he wished to surrender.

"That's all right," said the Englishman. "Are there any others?"

"Yes," the German replied. "There are thirty more, the men of my battery."

"Are they surrendering too?" our officer asked, realizing that his party was outnumbered, and that if the Germans cut up rusty it would not be too good.

"Yes. We all wish to surrender to the British. That is why I came."

There was some further conversation, in the course of which the German was told that he would be treated as a hostage for the good behaviour of the others, and that if any "funny stuff" occurred he would be shot at once. He gave his word of honour that no treachery was intended, and added that they had a canteen in the battery, which he had thought it a pity to destroy. That Nazi was a good psychologist. A "free for all" in the canteen would certainly help to ensure their good treatment as prisoners.

The surrender was duly taken, and the story goes that an excellent time was had by the crews of those landing craft, who had been living on monotonous tinned rations for many days. The German canteen contained things they had dreamt of but had not seen for months—cases of excellent bottled beer, bottles of wine, smoked hams, cheeses from Italy and Denmark, tins of olive oil, biscuits, sweets and chocolates, cigarettes by the thousand, sausages, fresh fruit, tinned meat and vegetables in quantity. There was enough and plenty to spare to give away to other hungry sailors.

It was a merry picnic that took place on the beach, with the Germans under guard in the background.

## CHAPTER XVI

SOUTHERN FRANCE INVADED.  
OPERATION "DRAGOON"

## I

ON July 23rd, about three weeks before the invasion of Southern France, His Majesty the King arrived at Naples by air for a visit to the British and Dominion forces in Italy. He spent the night as the guest of Admiral Sir John Cunningham at the Villa Emma at Posillipo.

Next morning, in brilliant weather, the King inspected warships, merchant vessels and naval establishments at Naples, and made a tour of the port area. Attended by the Supreme Allied Commander, General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, Admiral Sir John Cunningham, Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, and Rear-Admiral J. A. V. Morse, Flag Officer, Western Italy, His Majesty first inspected officers of the Royal Navy and of the Women's Royal Naval Service on parade at Fort del Ovo. Embarking in the Royal Barge, which was escorted by light coastal craft of the Royal and United States Navies, the King passed through the lines of warships and merchant vessels assembled in the anchorage. British and American ships predominated, but there were others flying the ensigns of the Netherlands, Poland, Greece and France.

His Majesty then landed and inspected the Capuano power station, which had been severely damaged by the Germans before their retreat from Naples in the previous October and was restored by joint naval and military resources, and later visited berths and docks in the reconstructed port. After walking past the port battalion of the United States Army, he then boarded the cruiser *Orion*, the flagship of Rear-Admiral J. M. Mansfield, where flag officers of the Royal Navy and

Vice-Admiral H. Kent Hewitt, United States Navy, were presented. The King was then received by Vice-Admiral Hewitt on board his flagship, U.S.S. *Catoctin*, where other American flag officers were presented.

There followed an inspection of representative detachments of all the Allied Navies and Merchant Navies massed on the parade ground of the Royal Naval Barracks, the guard of honour being mounted by the Royal Marines. The naval part of the King's tour concluded with a visit to Combined Naval and Coastal Air Headquarters at Navy House.

His Majesty's visit had been kept a secret. Coming as a complete surprise, it was highly gratifying to thousands of officers and ratings of the Royal Navy and the Women's Royal Naval Service who saw their Sovereign at Naples.

When the King was staying at the Villa Emma, which overlooked the Bay of Naples, two harbour defence motor launches had the duty of patrolling offshore to ward off any intruders from the sea. During the evening, after dinner, one local boat, fishing close inshore, was repeatedly warned to keep clear. Losing his patience, the officer commanding the M.L. was finally obliged to threaten more forceful action if his orders were not obeyed. It is possible that his language was more nautical than polite, until, coming close, he noticed a cloaked lady in the boat. Still insisting that the boat must move away, the officer apologized. But he had his orders, and they must be obeyed. The lady handed up her visiting card. She lived, it seemed, in a villa nearby, and was in the habit of fishing after dark.

She was the Queen of Italy.

## II

The main object of the invasion of Southern France on the morning of August 15th was the capture of St. Raphael, Ste. Maxime, St. Tropez, Toulon and Marseilles, followed by an advance up the valley of the Rhone to assist the operations of the Allied army already fighting in the north after its landing in Normandy.

It had been planned that before dark on the 14th an American

Airborne Division should be dropped near le Muy, on the railway line about ten miles east of St. Raphael, to destroy and interrupt communications and prevent enemy reinforcements from reaching the coast. During the night of the 14th-15th American special service troops would capture the islands of Port Cros and Levant, to the eastward of Toulon, while French Commando troops were to land on the mainland opposite at Cape Negre to destroy enemy defences and protect the left flank of the forces making the main assault to the eastward. The main assault was to be carried out at 8 a.m. on the 15th by three American infantry divisions and a few French troops landed in Cavalaire Bay, Pampelonne Bay, the Gulf of St. Tropez, and beaches near the Gulf of Fréjus. Diversionary operations were ordered to take place east and west of the main assault area. The troops in the follow-up convoys were to consist of five infantry and two armoured divisions, all French.

The beaches for the first landings extended over a distance of about thirty-five miles, and more than 800 warships of all types, with many merchant vessels, took part in the assault. Admiral Sir John Cunningham, Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, had established his advanced headquarters in H.M.S. *Largs* at Ajaccio. The Naval Commander for the actual operations was Vice-Admiral H. Kent Hewitt, U.S.N., with his flag in U.S.S. *Catocin*. In command of the three principal naval assault forces were Rear-Admiral Frank J. Lowry, U.S.N., in U.S.S. *Duane*, Rear-Admiral Bertram J. Rodgers, U.S.N., U.S.S. *Biscayne*, and Rear-Admiral Spencer S. Lewis.

The gunfire support forces consisted of the following:

*Battleships*: U.S.S. *Texas* (flag of Rear-Admiral Carleton F. Bryant, U.S.N.), U.S.S. *Nevada* and *Arkansas*, H.M.S. *Ramillies* (Captain G. B. Middleton) and the French *Lorraine*.

*Cruisers*: H.M.S. *Orion* (flag of Rear-Admiral J. M. Mansfield), *Aurora*, *Ajax*, *Black Prince*, *Dido*, *Sirius* and *Argonaut*, U.S.S. *Augusta* (flag of Rear-Admiral Lyal A. Davidson, U.S.N.), *Quincy*, *Philadelphia*, *Cincinnati*, *Marblehead*, *Tuscaloosa* (flag of Rear-Admiral Morton L. Deyo, U.S.N.),

*Brooklyn* and *Omaha*; French, *Emile Bertin* (flag of Contre-Amiral Auboyneau), *Duguay Trouin*, *Jeanne D'Arc*, *Montcalm*, *Georges Leygues* and *Gloire*.

An escort carrier force, which was to provide continuous air support during daylight, was under command of Rear-Admiral Thomas H. Troubridge in H.M.S. *Royalist*. The carriers operated in two groups: the first, consisting of the *Attacker*, *Searcher*, *Khedive*, *Emperor* and *Pursuer*, commanded by Rear-Admiral Troubridge himself; and the second, U.S.S. *Tulagi* and *Kasaan Bay*, with H.M.S. *Hunter* and *Stalker*, being under the command of Rear-Admiral Calvin T. Durgin, U.S.N. The anti-aircraft cruisers *Colombo*, *Delhi* and *Caledon* took part in the operations, with some 110 destroyers and destroyer escorts—fifty-seven American, twenty-eight British, and twenty French. Included among the British destroyers were the *Troubridge*, *Terpsichore*, *Termagant*, *Tuscan*, *Tyrian*, *Teazer*, *Tumult*, *Tenacious*, *Lookout* and *Kimberley*. Mr. Churchill visited the assault area in the *Kimberley* on August 15th, and the Supreme Allied Commander, General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, with the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, Admiral Sir John Cunningham, on the 16th.

Preceding the convoys during the approach and the various assaults were more than 100 British and American minesweepers. They included fleet minesweepers, trawlers, Y.M.S. and B.Y.M.S., M.Ls. and American submarine-chasers, together with a number of boat minesweepers for work close inshore. The names of some of these ships, with a description of their work, will be mentioned later.

Among the many other British vessels participating in Operation "Dragoon" were the tank-landing ships H.M.S. *Bruiser* and *Thruster*, and the gunboats *Aphis* and *Scarab*. The Royal Canadian Navy was represented by H.M.C.S. *Prince David* and *Prince Henry*, and working with them were H.M.S. *Princess Beatrix*, *Prince Albert* and *Prince Baudoin*.

There was a Polish destroyer present, the *Garland*, together with the Greek destroyers *Navarinon*, *Pindos*, *Crete* and *Themistocles* and three Greek-manned minesweepers.

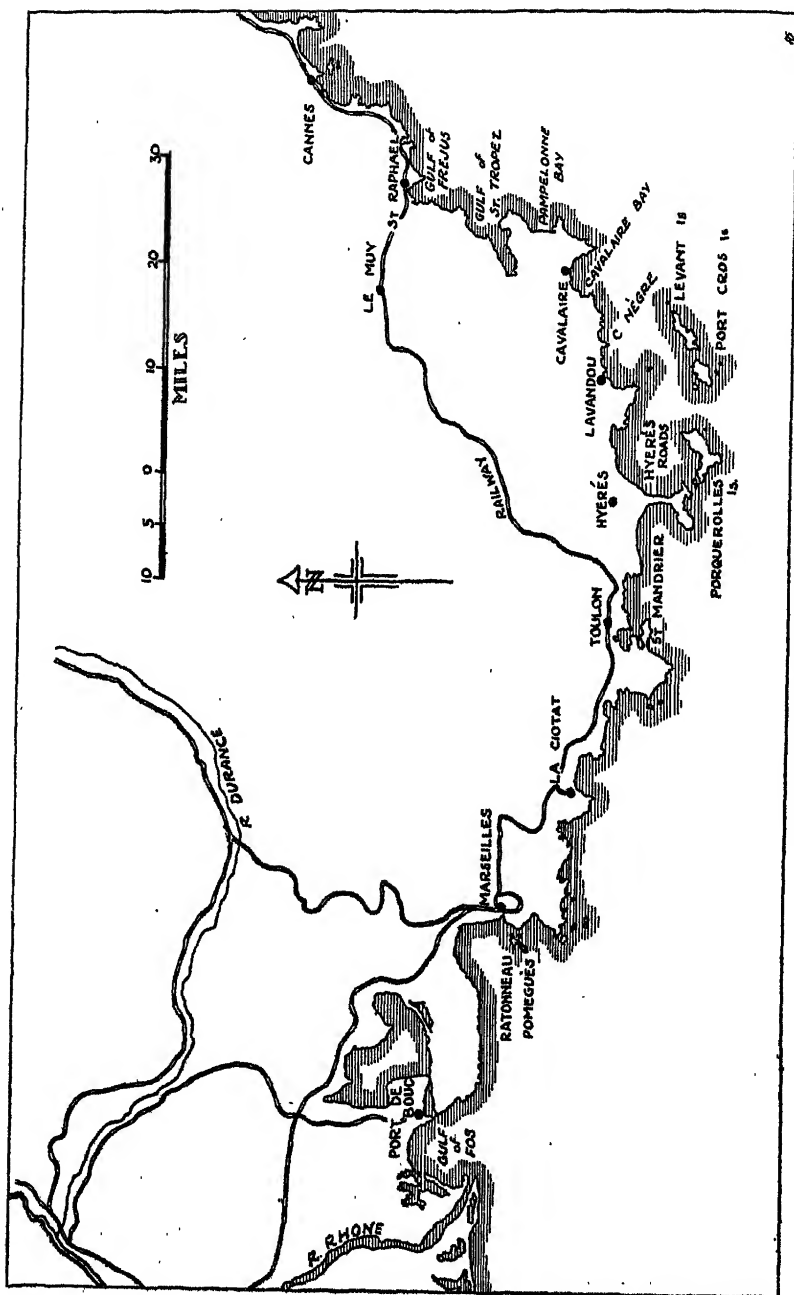
## III

The night of August 14th-15th was calm and windless, with good visibility, and hours before dawn minesweepers were at work searching the approach channels and gunfire support areas off the various beaches chosen for the assault.

Commander H. L. Jenkins, R.N., with the fleet sweepers *Larne*, *Stormcloud*, *Octavia*, *Welfare* and *Clinton*, with the trawler *Kintyre* as a dan-layer, all of the 5th Minesweeping Flotilla, laboured at clearing an area for bombarding ships to the southward of Levant Island. His four motor-launches swept the approach channel to Port Cros Island and channels inshore to the mainland. While this work was in progress M.L. 559 was damaged by a mine explosion, but managed to return to her base under her own power.

Both the islands mentioned were successfully occupied before daylight on the 15th by American special service troops, while the French Commandos were landed at Cape Nègre. Covered by the *Lorraine*, *Augusta* and *Dido*, the troops for both these operations were put ashore from H.M.C.S. *Prince David* and *Prince Henry* and H.M.S. *Princess Beatrix*, *Prince Albert* and *Prince Baudoin*. Two small enemy craft were sunk during the approach and prisoners taken. The defences of Levant Island were overrun without serious fighting, but at Port Cros Island the Germans still held out in the medieval fort, with its extremely thick walls. The garrison finally hoisted the white flag soon after midday on August 17th, after the position had been bombarded by the battleship *Ramillies* and the American cruiser *Augusta*.

There was heavy opposition to the French troops around Cape Nègre. H.M.S. *Dido* (Captain John Terry) was giving the necessary gunfire support in this area, her targets being enemy batteries, troop concentrations and mechanical transport. On D-day she carried out six separate bombardments, and during the morning her accurate shooting broke up a threatening counter-attack. On this occasion the observing officer ashore reported: "Counter-attack held at fifty yards.



INVASION OF SOUTHERN FRANCE.

Revolvers came in useful. Many thanks. Now at least fifty prisoners." Later, when firing at enemy reserves in a village, the *Dido* was informed, "You have destroyed about half the village. Nicely for the moment, thank you," and later in the day, after another successful shoot: "We hope you have interrupted the Germans' evening meal."

It was during one of the *Dido's* bombardments that the *Aurora* (Captain Geoffrey Barnard), appeared, and signalled: "Is this a private party or can anyone join in?" We do not know the answer.

On August 15th and 16th the cruiser *Argonaut* (Captain E. W. Longley-Cook), carried out twenty-two different bombardments of enemy batteries, troop concentrations and mechanical transport, firing in all more than 800 rounds from her 5·25-inch guns. On various occasions she received reports from the observing officers ashore, preceded always by the words: "Shoot successful." "Target completely destroyed." "Enemy dispersed." "One gun direct hit." "A very good job."

The *Argonaut* returned to the United Kingdom after completing her work off the South of France, but very soon returned to the Mediterranean for work in the Ægean, where she performed much useful service.

A minesweeping force under Commander Wallis, U.S.N., consisting of the *Prevail*, *Pioneer*, *Seer* and *Dexterous*, with five Y.M.S., two submarine-chasers and a British M.L., started to sweep Cavalaire Bay with the approach channel and bombardment area some time before the landing. They completed their task about an hour before the assaulting landing craft touched down on the beaches.

Another minesweeping force, under the command of Commander A. A. Martin, R.N.R., in H.M.S. *Rothsay*, with the *Bude*, *Brixham*, *Polruan*, *Stornoway* and *Aries*, the trawlers *Nebb* and *Borealis* as dan-layers, and five Y.M.S., four submarine-chasers and eight minesweepers, all of the United States Navy, had the task of sweeping the assault channel in to "Yellow Beach" in Pampelonne Bay, south of St. Tropez. They started at about 6 a.m., some two hours before the



landing, with the smaller sweepers ahead. Supporting destroyers had silenced some of the enemy's shore batteries, but on the way in Commander Martin's force was fired upon by five enemy patrol craft close inshore. They were using heavy machine guns, and some of their rounds fell unpleasantly close. The sweepers replied, and in a matter of minutes two of the enemy craft were sunk, another was set on fire and abandoned, and the remaining two beached themselves. "It was indeed good," wrote Martin, "to see the advance group proceeding ashore, sweeps running well and in good formation, with guns pointing and barking shorewards, followed by the remainder."

In the Gulf of St. Tropez, ten American Y.M.S. and four British M.Ls. swept into the assault area, and eight boat minesweepers continued as close inshore as possible. The British fleet sweepers *Rinaldo*, *Antares*, *Arcturus*, *Brave*, *Rosario* and *Spanker*, under Commander C. H. Corbet-Singleton, R.N., with the American minesweepers *Sway*, *Swift*, *Symbol* and *Threat*, commanded by Commander Ruth, U.S.N., swept the area to be occupied by the transports and the bombarding forces. All this work had been completed by 4 p.m. on D-day.

The minesweeping force for the beaches near the Gulf of Fréjus consisted of the five American sweepers, *Strive*, *Staff*, *Speed*, *Steady* and *Sustain*, with H.M. trawler *Foula* as danglelayer, under the command of Lieutenant-Commander Maloney, U.S.N.; the British trawlers *Ailsa Craig*, *Crowlin*, *Mewstone* and *Skokholm*, under Lieutenant Hornby, R.N.R.; together with five American Y.M.S., six B.Y.M.S., six M.Ls. and eight boat minesweepers. This force swept boat channels into two of the beaches and completed the work within an hour. Later in the morning three of the M.Ls., with other craft, started sweeping an approach channel into the Gulf of Fréjus, but were forced to retire by heavy gunfire. The sweepers then cleared an area for the destroyers providing gunfire support; and by the evening of D-day all the area except the thickly mined Gulf of Fréjus had been cleared.

The enemy coastal positions and batteries had been systematically and heavily bombed by the 15th American Army Air Force by day and the R.A.F. by night, their attack being on a heavier and more effective scale than anything previously seen in the Mediterranean. Preceded by heavy naval gunfire on all the beaches and their defences, the assault craft started to move in exactly on time, and at 8 a.m. were beginning to touch down. Such were the effects of the combined bombing and bombardments that there was very slight opposition to the landings, or to the subsequent advance of the troops towards their first objectives. According to German accounts, the defences were completely overwhelmed by the bombing and naval gunfire. The latter was certainly without precedent in the Mediterranean. It was later reported that in the first three days 15,900 shell of 5-inch calibre and above were expended by the ships of the Allied Navies during the preliminary naval bombardment and subsequent gunfire support, of which 1,250 were of 12-inch calibre or above.

"Compared with Salerno," as one naval officer said, "landing in the south of France was a real picnic. To start with, the *Luftwaffe* was conspicuous by its absence, which, of course, didn't displease us. The weather was gloriously fine, and it seemed rather a shame to be shooting off all we had in the direction of those peaceful, pleasant-looking little coast towns with their yellow beaches. Some of the sweepers and landing craft inshore may have had a tough time, but we in the bombarding ships certainly didn't. Not a round came near us, though now and then one saw the flash of an enemy gun among the hills. Our bombardment was pretty terrific at first, and the whole coast and the hills beyond were at times almost hidden in the smoke of bombs and shell-bursts. I should imagine that the defences were pretty well softened by the time the assaults went in. They certainly were in our sector. I rather pitied the poor blighters. Later, we became rather bored with it, and in the intervals of bombarding our gun's crews were sunning themselves on deck. Someone even produced one of those accordion things, which struck me as a bit

odd. One saw the regular processions of landing craft and Dukws leaving their ships and paddling unconcernedly ashore to the crowded beaches. Except for an occasional burst of gunfire as some ship or another opened up on being asked to do so from the shore, D-day reminded me more of August Bank Holiday at Margate or Brighton than a full-scale invasion. We had expected something rather tough, but it wasn't tough at all. Personally I felt a bit cheated, almost as though we weren't really doing our job. I nearly forgot to say that on the first day the Prime Minister suddenly appeared in a destroyer. He came out of the blue, and we knew nothing of his arrival until it was broadcast through the ship. Our men cheered, and, looking through glasses as he went past, we could see the old boy on the destroyer's bridge smoking a cigar and making his V-sign. It bucked up our men no end."

From the account of one naval officer who landed on D-day, the scene ashore was not very warlike: "The little town had been rather knocked about and the beach defences flattened. There were some crowds of excited people, mostly women and children, waving French flags with an occasional Union Jack or Stars and Stripes. They were genuinely pleased to see us, and when they got going were all over us with flowers and bottles of wine. They were rather a nuisance, and we had to post armed sentries to keep them off. A lot of the women were very well dressed and quite ravishing, dolled up to the nines, though I heard later that some of them who had been too friendly with the Germans were hunted down by the local F.F.I. with their tommy-guns and were stripped naked or had their heads shaved in the public square before being paraded through the streets with "collaborationist" placards round their necks. Some of the people wanted to kiss us in their excitement; but those were not the young and beautiful, only the old and ugly. I shall never forget being warmly embraced by one male gargoyle with a three days' growth of beard and long yellow teeth who reeked of a mixture of garlic and bad brandy. He was distinctly shot away, and offered me heaven knows how many francs for a packet of cigarettes; I wasn't

doing business in that quarter, though the children soon cleared us out of the few sweets and chocolates we'd brought, poor little devils. Except for mines and booby traps, our landing was peaceful enough. I must say I was surprised."

The landings proceeded smoothly and according to plan. Fine weather continued, and troops, with their guns, mechanical transport, food and other miscellaneous equipment, flowed ashore in an ever-increasing stream.

On August 16th, when the Supreme Commander, General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, with Admiral Sir John Cunningham, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, steamed through the invasion fleet in H.M.S. *Kimberley*, the ships off the coast were described as "stretching for miles with hardly a break." As the *Kimberley* passed each group a signal was made: "General Wilson and Admiral Cunningham wish you good luck. Your great enterprise will make history, and it will deal a fatal blow to the enemy."

By the 17th, St. Tropez, St. Maxime, St. Raphael and Fréjus were all in Allied hands, while the troops had penetrated a considerable distance inland. On the east they were within ten miles of Cannes, and on the west about the same distance from Toulon.

The invasion was successful; but the Navies were to see considerable fighting and a great deal more arduous work before Toulon and Marseilles were in Allied hands.

#### IV

With the operations spread over so wide an area, it is difficult to describe events in their strict chronological order. Before daylight on D-day naval units had bombarded enemy positions in the area between Cannes and Nice by way of a demonstration. The *Aphis* (Lieutenant E. E. Clifton, R.N.R.) and *Scarab* (Lieutenant E. A. Hawkesworth, R.N.V.R.), were both in action. There was inaccurate return fire from the shore. Their work here completed, the two little ships proceeded west to operate with a combined Anglo-American naval force

off Ciotat, midway between Toulon and Marseilles. Here, before dawn on the 17th, they engaged enemy heavy batteries and machine-gun nests with some 200 rounds of 6-inch. The area was soon being swept by enemy searchlights and there was heavy return fire from the German guns, though none of the Allied ships was hit.

The dawn came with a thin mist to seaward, and just before six o'clock the *Aphis* and *Scarab* became aware of an enemy frigate and a corvette to the southward. The old ships worked up to full speed, such as it was, and at 6.12 opened fire at a distance of about 10,000 yards, gradually closing the range. Further inshore an American destroyer, U.S.S. *Kendrick*, headed off the enemy's retreat.

The two gunboats soon came under heavy fire, which rapidly became accurate. Clifton reported that about fifty shell burst within 50 yards of his ship, and that splinters came whistling on board in showers. Wisely, he laid a smoke-screen. The American destroyer was now firing from longer range, but, emerging from the smoke, both gunboats again came into action. In a few minutes one of them obtained a hit in the boiler-room of the larger of the two vessels, which "blew sky high" with a great upheaval of smoke and water. A hit was also made on the forecastle of the smaller ship, which made off to the westward at top speed with our ships in chase.

"From then on it was just easy," Clifton wrote. Their larger opponent had vanished, and the two gunboats and the destroyer continued to fire on the other until after about an hour she was "lying over on her starboard side and down by the stern, burning fiercely with exploding ammunition falling into the sea all around." She sank later thirteen miles south of Cape Croisette. Our ships closed the places where both ships had vanished and rescued 210 survivors, some of whom were wounded. "One or two of our prisoners, with long naval experience," says Clifton, "were cheerful and glad to be out of the war. Others were truculent young Nazis, who ranged themselves in the forepart of the *Aphis* and gave the Nazi salute when the second ship went to the bottom."

In spite of their age, both the old gunboats seem to have developed a remarkable turn of speed during the action, which lasted off and on for two hours. Lieutenant Hawkesworth, of the *Scarab*, mentions that his engine-room staff maintained a speed of fifteen knots during the whole period, in spite of minor damage caused by blast and excessive vibration. This, he added, was entirely due to his engineer, Chief Engine-room Artificer Bradfield.

The pertinacious work of the minesweepers in the few days following the assault, and later, was an important contributory cause to the success of the invasion. The Gulf of Fréjus, as has been said, was heavily mined, and on August 16th, D + 1, small sweepers started to hew their way through the mine barrier, as St. Raphael was required for landing supplies. The work began with six British motor-launches of the 3rd Flotilla (Lieutenant-Commander Pearce, R.N.V.R.), sweeping along the western shore. They parted their sweeps on obstructions; but reformed, streamed new gear and carried on. Meanwhile, four American Y.M.S. under Lieutenant Sherman, U.S.N., were searching the area for ground mines. Y.M.S. 24 struck a moored mine and was severely damaged. Pearce, in H.M. M.L. 563, at once went to her rescue, and while transferring survivors was mined also, Pearce himself being injured. Work was stopped for the time while the sweepers were reformed. Lieutenant-Commander E. R. D. Swarder, R.N.V.R., then took three M.Ls. and two B.Y.M.S. under his orders and swept a channel through to the beach, cutting five mines in the process. Lieutenant-Commander Hardy, U.S.N., next collected a force of Y.M.S. and widened the gap, while boat minesweepers close inshore disposed of nineteen more mines. Before the Gulf of Fréjus was finally cleared, British and American sweepers accounted for eighty-seven mines, while a large amount of gear was lost on the enemy's anti-sweeping obstructions. Three sweepers were lost. It was just one incident in a long story; nevertheless, another example of successful and whole-hearted teamwork between British and Americans.

Aircraft reconnaissance had showed that the area inside Port Cros and Levant Islands and the entrances to Hyères Road were thickly mined. From August 16th to the 23rd, Commander Jenkins' 5th Minesweeping Flotilla, *Larne*, *Stormcloud*, *Octavia*, *Welfare* and *Clinton*, were sweeping here to provide clear water for the gunfire support ships. During these operations they came under heavy fire from enemy batteries, which was replied to by the cruiser *Ajax* and the destroyers *Terpsichore* and *Termagant*. Though frequently straddled by shell, the *Larne* once having her sweep wire cut, the only casualty was M.L. 562. She was hit by a 5-inch shell in the wardroom, and by some lucky chance had no killed or wounded. She managed to make Cape Nègre for shelter at sixteen knots with the starboard side of her wardroom open to the sea.

In all the assault areas, as ever, the work of the minesweepers was beyond all praise. They had none of the excitement of battle. Their task meant hard, unremitting labour, with a large element of danger, and exasperating delays when their sweep wires fouled and broke on the many obstructions laid by the enemy. They had evolved a tradition of their own. They were always on the spot when needed, and in spite of losses and set-backs carried on with their work until it was finished.

v

From dawn on August 15th until dark on the 26th, naval aircraft from Rear-Admiral Troubridge's force of escort carriers provided constant daylight air support over the invasion area. As has been said, the force operated in two groups; the first, under Rear-Admiral Troubridge himself, consisting of five British carriers, and the second, under Rear-Admiral C. T. Durgin, U.S.N., of two American carriers and two British.

For the first five days both groups operated off the coast simultaneously, after which Admiral Troubridge's group

returned to their base to fuel and then returned to relieve Admiral Durgin's. Thereafter one group operated while the other remained at the base.

As originally planned, the naval aircraft were primarily intended for tactical reconnaissance, spotting the artillery fire of bombarding ships, and fighter cover over the beaches and their own forces. For the first two days of the operation they were used for these purposes only. The Air Force Commander, Brigadier-General G. P. Saville, United States Army Air Force, under whose general orders the force operated, had had no previous experience of carrier-borne aircraft. The number available after their first commitments had been satisfied provided a surplus, and, to General Saville's "gratification and surprise," he found "that he had at his disposal not only an unexpectedly powerful and efficient air support force, but, what was of greater moment, one that was capable of answering any call at the shortest notice." Thereafter full advantage was taken of the naval aircraft for a heavy programme of fighter-bombing and ground-strafting.

We have no record of the work of Rear-Admiral Durgin's group, but the total number of sorties flown by the five carriers commanded by Rear-Admiral Troubridge, H.M.S.'s *Attacker*, *Searcher*, *Khedive*, *Emperor* and *Pursuer*, was 983. Sixteen aircraft were lost by enemy action, and twenty-seven lost or severely damaged by other accidents. Eleven pilots were missing through enemy action, though six eventually returned to their ships, while one was seriously injured in a crash on deck.

The amount of destruction wrought on the enemy's communications by the naval aircraft was impressive. On the testimony of Brigadier-General Saville, whose keen appreciation of, and eloquent tributes to, the Naval Air Support Force were a constant incentive, their work proved "a not unimportant factor in the rapid advance of the Army from the beach-head." The following claims of damage done to the enemy by aircraft from the five carriers under Troubridge's command err on the side of conservatism:



*Motor transport:* 160 destroyed, 190 damaged.

*Armoured fighting vehicles:* 4 destroyed, 16 damaged.

*Railway trucks:* 64 destroyed, 83 damaged.

*Tanks:* 4 damaged.

*Bridges:* 4 destroyed, 5 damaged.

*Roads cut:* 18.

*Railways cut:* 14.

*Military installations:* 53 direct hits.

*Shipping sunk:* 1 merchant vessel, 1 paddle-steamer, 1 motor torpedo-boat, 1 motor launch, 3 barges.

No mission had ever to be cancelled through the unserviceability of aircraft, a magnificent achievement on the part of the maintenance crews and handling parties. The average serviceability of aircraft taking part in the operation was 85 per cent., while in Admiral Troubridge's force an average of one aircraft took off every six minutes from dawn to dusk; each pilot flew on an average 2,300 miles; and the total distance flown by aircraft was 275,603 miles.

In his report, Admiral Troubridge observed that he had been away from close contact with naval flying for nearly two years, and was able to appreciate the great progress that had been made. In this connection, he paid a tribute to the great work of his predecessor, Rear-Admiral A. W. La T. Bisset, "whose sudden illness, just prior to the operation, deprived him of the happiness of seeing the force he had raised and trained in action. The credit for our progress is largely his." The Admiral also recorded the close and excellent co-operation of Rear-Admiral Durgin, and the zeal and enthusiasm of the commanding officers of the escort carriers, and their officers and men, whose exertions were largely responsible for the good work of the aircraft, and added that the untiring efforts of his staff in the planning stage under the able direction of Captain J. G. Hewitt, and later, during the actual operation, were an outstanding contribution to the success of the naval air support force. Elsewhere the Admiral had remarked that once in the air the British naval pilots were "second to none."

It was gratifying to the officers and men of the force as a

whole when they received the following message from Brigadier-General Saville: "I would like to express my appreciation of the outstanding work the carrier support force has done, and of their perfect co-operation. I consider the co-operation of this force to be a model of perfection, and a severe standard for future operations."

## VI

By August 17th the Army had occupied some fifty miles of coast, from Lavandou (on the mainland opposite to Port Cros Island) on the west, almost to Cannes on the east. There was fighting on both flanks, in which warships of the Allied Navies supported the Army by shelling hostile batteries and troop concentrations from the sea.

On August 17th enemy guns near Cannes were silenced by American cruisers and destroyers, with the anti-aircraft cruisers, H.M.S. *Delhi* and *Colombo* augmenting the United States naval forces on their eastern flank. Similar bombardments took place in the same area on the 18th and 19th. A cruiser and destroyers were all in action, the former, with an aeroplane spotting, obtaining direct hits on gun emplacements and successfully neutralizing the targets.

On the 18th, in the west, the French battleship *Lorraine*, with the cruiser *Emile Bertin*, shelled the German-held island of Porquerolles, off Hyères, while an American cruiser, with the *Gloire* and H.M.S. *Ajax*, bombarded in support of the Army on the mainland. Porquerolles and the area round Hyères received further attention from two American cruisers and the *Georges Leygues* on the 19th, while the *Lorraine*, screened by destroyers, was in action against the defences of Toulon with her 13.4-inch guns. She obtained direct hits on the ex-French battle cruiser *Strasbourg* lying in the harbour, and the coastal batteries on the St. Mandrier Peninsula, protecting Toulon from the southward, were well covered. The defences here were formidable, the Germans having mounted 13-inch guns taken from the damaged French ships in the harbour,

deep, shell-proof shelters having been constructed for the guns' crews.

Bombardments took place with daily regularity, and at about 10 a.m. on the 20th, after the haze had lifted, the Toulon defences were again under fire from two battleships and six cruisers. Some 1,400 rounds were fired, with good results. Among the ships taking part were the British cruisers *Aurora* and *Black Prince*, with the *Lorraine*, the *Emile Bertin* and the large French destroyer *Le Fantasque*. E-boats from Toulon tried to attack this force after dark; but were beaten off with a loss of one sunk and one driven ashore in flames.

There were further bombardments of Toulon and St. Mandrier on the 21st and 22nd, while enemy batteries around Gien and Hyères were heavily shelled by five cruisers, which included the *Aurora*, *Emile Bertin* and *Montcalm*. All this naval gunfire, admirably spotted and deadly in its accuracy, was of untold assistance in forwarding the advance of the troops towards Toulon.

On the 21st Porquerolles was bombarded for the last time by a United States destroyer, which removed some prisoners, and the day following white flags were flying and the island surrendered to an American cruiser. The German garrison of more than 200 was removed, and French troops installed in their place.

The troops continued their advance towards Toulon, and on August 23rd and 24th warships were again in action in support. Others engaged the forts at St. Mandrier. Further west enemy batteries near Marseilles were bombarded by a battleship and two cruisers. By the evening of the 24th Allied troops were fighting in the outskirts of Toulon. Only three hostile batteries there remained active—two on the St. Mandrier Peninsula and one at Cape Sicie, some five miles to the westward.

All through this period Allied naval units had been covering the right flank of the Army near Cannes. Naval bombardments in this area soon lost their novelty, and came to be regarded as a matter of daily routine. Naval communiqués announcing that

American or French destroyers had bombarded enemy batteries, strong-points, troop concentrations or other targets "near the Franco-Italian frontier" continued to be issued until the end of the war.

On August 25th the forts at St. Mandrier, which were still holding out, were subjected to a full-scale bombardment by many ships, which included the *Ramillies* (Captain G. B. Middleton), *Aurora* (Captain Geoffrey Barnard), *Sirius* (Captain R. L. M. Edwards), the *Lorraine* and *Gloire*, with various destroyers, which included U.S.S. *Kendrick* and H.M.S. *Lookout* (Lieutenant-Commander D. H. F. Hetherington).

Captain Barnard had been deputed to take charge of the operations, and for a time the *Aurora*, *Lookout* and *Kendrick* had the field more or less to themselves, moving in to within 14,000 yards or even closer. They were soon in hot action and under fire, and Captain Barnard confessed to feeling rather naked as he watched the great splashes of the enemy's 13-inch guns creeping uncomfortably close to his lightly-protected ship. However, by zigzagging and the judicious use of smoke-screens from the destroyers he managed to avoid being hit. The bombardment had apparently started at about 1 p.m. Later in the afternoon more ships joined in, until, at about 4 p.m., Captain Barnard was reporting being "nicely engaged in Toulon Bay. Heavy batteries finished. *Lorraine*, *Gloire* and *Sirius* in company," apart, of course, from the destroyers. Two hours later he was "keeping the party going" with the same ships, and the *Ramillies* coming to join.

It was a peculiar situation. Captain Barnard was junior to several of the other commanding officers present, including the Captain of the *Lorraine*. He had been put in charge of the operations by the American Admiral commanding his particular task force, which had to be explained to those who were his seniors in rank. They all requested him to carry on.

According to all accounts, it was a party well worth attending, though it should be noted that Barnard's message reporting "Heavy batteries finished" was not strictly accurate. He was not to know that the guns had merely ceased firing

because of the hail of shell poured on the positions, their crews having gone underground. It was a "hail" of shell. The *Aurora* and *Lookout* alone fired 1,673 rounds of 6-inch and 4.7-inch shell at St. Mandrier during that exciting afternoon, and what may have been the expenditure of the other ships one has no means of knowing.

The *Lookout's* captain mentioned very accurate fire from a battery of 5-inch or 6-inch guns and the shell falling within 50 yards of his ship. He repaid the compliment with his 4.7's and silenced the battery for the time being. But conditions were not easy. As Hetherington remarked, the smoke-screens of funnel and artificial smoke made it difficult to see what was happening, while matters were not improved by the constant alterations of course necessitated by laying smoke, dodging enemy salvoes, bringing one's own guns to bear on enemy batteries, and avoiding other destroyers steaming at high speed through the thick fog caused by the smoke-screen.

At 5.30 p.m. orders were received to cover the whole of St. Mandrier with fire for one hour, and before long two battleships, five cruisers and a large number of destroyers were all engaged at varying ranges. To quote the *Lookout's* captain: "A remarkable concentration of shells was put down which completely stopped the return fire and left the island covered with smoke and fires." At 7 p.m. came the order to cease firing, and nine minutes later Barnard reported: "Firing ceased. All quiet in Toulon Bay."

As has been said, the batteries were not entirely knocked out. St. Mandrier was again heavily bombarded on the 20th, and when firing ceased at 4.30 p.m. there had been many explosions, and the peninsula was again enveloped in flame. The garrison of this last pocket of enemy resistance in the Toulon area did not finally surrender until 11 a.m. on the 28th. The bombardments from the sea had played a vital part in its reduction.

The Naval Commander off the South Coast of France, Admiral H. Kent Hewitt, U.S.N., recognized this when he signalled to the *Aurora* that the action of August 25th under

Captain Barnard's leadership had dealt the enemy a severe blow, and he hoped that more opportunities might fall to his lot. The American Admiral also signalled to the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Sir John Cunningham, that he considered the Captain of *Aurora* had demonstrated high qualities of aggressiveness and leadership, particularly in action against St. Mandrier on August 25th.

There have been nine *Aurora's* in the Royal Navy since 1758, and the last holder of the name was a veteran of long service and of many engagements in the Mediterranean. That gallant little cruiser has now been given to a foreign Power under a new name. When a tenth *Aurora* comes to be built for the Royal Navy it is to be hoped that "St. Mandrier, August 25th, 1944" may figure among her battle honours.

Toulon was again in the hands of the French. There remained the port of Marseilles, off which, at eight o'clock on the morning of August 29th, the unconditional surrender of the German garrisons of Ratonneau and Pomegues were accepted by the captain of an American cruiser. Both islands were well defended and had suffered heavy bombardment. United States Marines were landed, to find that demolitions had been prepared to blow up the small harbour and key positions. However, the charges were successfully removed and land-mines isolated. The 900 prisoners of war which comprised the garrisons were evacuated in the afternoon of August 30th.

## VII

Like Toulon, the port of Marseilles had been bombed by the Allies. Most of the facilities that remained had been savagely destroyed by the Germans. Like Naples, it would take weeks before the port could handle the huge quantities of stores and supplies for the Army which was eventually to advance into the interior up the valley of the Rhone.

Twenty miles west of Marseilles, however, is the Gulf of Fos, on the west side of which the Rhone flows into the sea. On the east side is Port de Bouc. It was on beaches near here

that landing ships and craft could put ashore the supplies needed by the Army. The Gulf of Fos, however, was thickly mined and must be systematically swept before it could be used by shipping.

On August 24th, when the coast defences were still in the hands of the enemy, the work was started by Commander A. A. Martin's experienced 13th Minesweeping Flotilla—H.M.S. *Rothelay*, *Bude*, *Brixham*, *Polruan*, *Stornoway* and *Aries*, with the *Nebb* and *Borealis* as dan-layers.

The sweepers at once came under heavy fire, with the salvoes falling right in among them. Undeterred, they laid a smoke-screen and carried on with their work, the smoke causing the enemy's fire to become less accurate. With the help of American Y.M.S. and other small vessels, the task continued on the 25th, though because of the damage caused by exploding mines much time was spent in recovering gear, bending on new sweeps, and sometimes in clearing mines from the sweeps. The loss of gear was beginning to become serious, and spares had to be transferred from ship to ship. However, by that evening they had opened a channel twenty-five miles long into the Gulf of Fos, and had swept sixty-five mines.

On recommencing their work on the 26th, the sweepers again came under the heavy fire of the enemy guns. Again a smoke-screen was laid and the work continued, the batteries being hotly engaged by an American destroyer, U.S.S. *Somers*. It was fortunate, Commander Martin said, that his flotilla had no casualties or damage, while he was pleased to receive a signal from the *Somers'* Captain to the effect that the sweepers were deserving of commendation for continuing directly into fire at end of their designated area and completing the work in spite of heavy and accurate fire from three batteries.

Further mines were swept on the 27th and 28th, and by August 31st the clearance of the Gulf of Fos was completed and a total of 172 mines accounted for. It was a notable mine-sweeping achievement carried out without loss in circumstances of no little difficulty and danger. That Commander Martin should at once become known as "The Wizard of

Fos" goes without saying. He himself wrote in terms of the highest praise of the excellent work and co-operation of all the ships of his unit, which also included American Y.M.S., submarine-chasers and boat minesweepers: "It speaks very highly for the spirit of friendliness and determination to pull together and succeed that an Anglo-American unit which had never formerly operated together could so quickly function as a practised team."

Meanwhile Commander Wallis, U.S.N., with U.S.S. *Prevail*, *Pioneer*, *Seer* and *Dexterous*, with Y.M.S. and submarine-chasers under Lieutenant Johnson, U.S.N., cleared a gunfire support area of about thirty square miles which enabled cruisers to silence batteries south of Marseilles. During this operation, and the subsequent opening of a channel into Marseilles, seventy-two mines were disposed of up to August 31st.

U.S.S. *Strive*, *Staff*, *Speed*, *Steady* and *Sustain*, with ten Y.M.S., three British M.Ls., and the trawlers *Salsa* and *Calm* as dan-layers, swept the initial channel into Toulon and widened the approaches. After ninety-five mines had been disposed of, the anchorage was open to shipping by 2 p.m. on August 30th. M.Ls. searching through the entrance into the harbour accounted for another seven mines. Further mines were swept up in and around Toulon in September, and on the 13th of that month the harbour was finally reported safe.

The outer anchorage at Marseilles and its southern approaches were cleared by American sweepers by August 29th, though mines continued to be discovered in the inner harbour and basins during September. It was not until the end of that month that the port was entirely free.

Once again the Allied minesweepers had done a magnificent job. In five weeks, working without intermission, they had cleared the approaches, anchorages, entrances and inner harbours and basins of the three major ports of Southern France. Further afield, in sixteen days from D-day, they had swept 370 square miles of sea and accounted for 459 mines.



## VIII

On the morning of September 13th, H.M.S. *Sirius* (Captain R. L. M. Edwards), flying the flag of Admiral Sir John Cunningham, with the American cruiser *Philadelphia*, joined the French fleet for its ceremonial entry into the dockyard and port of Toulon. Our rendezvous was made twelve miles out at sea in grey, overcast weather and heavy, driving rain. The French ships, flying their largest tricolours, were steaming in three columns under the command of Rear-Admiral Lemonnier, with his flag in the cruiser *Georges Leygues*.

On meeting, the French Admiral signalled to the Commander-in-Chief: "Upon re-entering our port once more, I would express to you, in the name of the Minister of French Naval Affairs, the great appreciation of the French Navy for the success achieved under your command."

Sir John Cunningham replied: "Thank you for your kind message. On this great day in the history of the gallant French Navy I should like you to know how greatly honoured and proud I am in having French ships under my command in the Mediterranean and for the final liberation of France."

By 10.30 the French fleet formed into a long single line, headed by the *Georges Leygues*. The old battleship *Lorraine* came next, then the cruiser *Emile Bertin*, with the flag of Rear-Admiral Auboyneau, followed by the *Duguay Trouin*, *Montcalm* and *Gloire*. The *Sirius* and *Philadelphia* followed. Some French destroyers and submarine-chasers were in attendance, and the scene lost nothing in impressiveness through lack of colour in sky, land or sea. There was no pageantry; but we could imagine the feelings in the hearts of the French seamen. It was as though we were entering Portsmouth Harbour after nearly two years' occupation by a hated enemy.

We passed the battered forts of St. Mandrier, with the gashed and torn hillsides and the muzzles of the heavy guns cocked forlornly up to the sky. On its sea side hardly a tree was standing, and the slopes looked like heaps of road metal dumped out of giant baskets and blackened by fire. Fired upon

by many of the ships now steaming past it, the peninsula looked as though it had been shaken from its very foundations. Moving slowly through the boom and past the wrecks of sunken ships, the *Sirius* had taken up her berth in the inner harbour by 11.30 a.m. The British anti-aircraft carrier *Delhi* (Captain G. R. Waymouth), lay in the outer anchorage. During that day official visits were exchanged between Sir John Cunningham, Rear-Admirals Lemonnier and Auboyneau, and Vice-Admiral H. Kent Hewitt, U.S.N., who was present in his flagship, U.S.S. *Catoctin*.

September 14th was fine and very hot. The French naval authorities held an official reception and luncheon at the Naval Club in Toulon which was attended by all the flag officers and captains. By 2.30 p.m. the streets had been lined by French naval ratings and the crowds had collected. Parties from the British and American warships and three battalions of French seamen had been landed under arms. Soon, with their bands in attendance, they were massing opposite the bomb-scarred War Memorial of 1914-18 in the Place de Justice: British and American seamen in white; Royal Marines and United States Marines in khaki and olive-drab; the French seamen in their white trousers, white gaiters and blue jumpers. There came bursts of cheering and clapping from the crowds as the detachments marched to their places with bands playing. Closest to the cenotaph to the memory of the fallen French seamen of the previous war stood a party of F.F.I. in civilian clothes and armlets carrying rifles and tommy-guns. There were also some widows and orphans in deep mourning, a French officer on crutches, with many medals, and a trio of brightly dressed young women with wreaths. We waited.

The French and Allied flag officers and French officials came on foot, to the accompaniment of more clapping. The men on parade were inspected, and the official party took their places at the base of the War Memorial. The three wreaths were laid by the Admirals, the detachments presented arms, and French bugles sounded the "Last Post." There came one minute's silence. A woman behind me was sobbing. There

were few of us not overcome by emotion. Then a French naval band played the Marseillaise, followed by the National Anthems of the United States and Britain.

The Admirals and officials moved off in their cars to a position further along the Boulevard Strasbourg, and took their stand on the pavement and a small dais overlooking it. M. Louis Jacquimot, the French Minister of Naval Affairs, with the Mayor and Prefect of Toulon, joined them.

We had not long to wait before the first of the armed detachments came marching by with their colours and band—tall American Marines followed by seamen. The crowd clapped. People clapped again as the White Ensign appeared at the head of a detachment of seamen and Royal Marines from the *Sirius* and *Delhi* marching past to "Hearts of Oak" and "Life on the Ocean Wave." But they clapped loudest of all, and cheered, as the mass of French seamen came past with their bands playing a quickstep and the bugles chiming in. I noticed that ahead of the detachment from each ship a seaman carried her small crested silk banner, or *fanion*, stuck in the muzzle of his rifle.

The atmosphere was again charged with emotion. One could feel it. The crowds of this great French seaport were friendly and polite to the Americans and British. But they took those French sailors to their hearts as in similar circumstances the people of any town or city in Britain would have welcomed the men of the Royal Navy.

Toulon might have had its houses smashed, its dockyard wrecked and its harbour littered with sunken ships; but at last it was free of a hated enemy. The French Navy had been in action, and had again come into its own after years of suffering. It was the living symbolism of the afternoon's ceremony and parade that made many of us British and Americans feel something of what lay in the hearts of these thousands of French men and women. One cannot adequately describe it; but for many of them September 14th, 1944, will ever be a red-letter day in the calendar of their lives. They saw something and felt something which signified the re-birth of their nation and their Navy.

CHAPTER XVII

MISCELLANY

I

**J**ULY 18th, 1944, had seen the commercial port of Ancona, on the Adriatic coast of Italy, captured by Polish troops. To the west, Florence fell on August 4th, and the Fifth Army moved north and north-west to make touch with Kesselring's 'Gothic Line,' which stretched from Pisa, north of Leghorn, through the formidable central ridges of the Apennines, to the line of the Rubicone, on the Adriatic, some ten miles north of Rimini.

By the end of August the Eighth Army had begun its advance with its right flank on the Adriatic. By secretly transferring troops, General Sir Harold Alexander forced Kesselring gradually to move the weight of his defence to the Adriatic sector, where the Eighth Army was soon engaged in bitter fighting. By August 28th destroyers were bombarding along the coast road in the Pesaro area, and on September 2nd were lending the weight of their supporting gunfire at enemy positions and troop concentrations near Rimini. Two destroyers or gunboats bombarded in support of the Army practically every day until the end of September, their fire being most effective against the German mobile artillery and transport. By September 20th they were engaging the strong enemy defences on the Rubicone. Inland, north of Florence, the 'Gothic Line' had been breached in the mountains near Firenzuola on September 19th, and within five days the whole German defence system had started to crumble. September 26th saw the forcing of the defences on the Rubicone, so that the whole of the 'Gothic Line' from west to east had been penetrated.

Bombardments from the sea are never very interesting for the participants, though on many occasions the ships came under return fire from the shore. But in the month of September the destroyers H.M.S. *Loyal*, *Undine*, *Urchin*, *Kimberley* and *Lookout* between them flung some 7,500 4.7-inch shell at the enemy, while the gunboats *Aphis* and *Scarab* contributed another 566 rounds of 6-inch. It is on record that this naval gunfire was of the greatest assistance to the Army. The ships were operating in waters which had freely been mined by the enemy, and some seventy mines were cut by minesweepers, which also came under fire on various occasions. The vulnerable little wooden motor minesweepers did particularly fine work in most trying and difficult conditions, as, indeed, did the destroyers and gunboats.

The mention of minesweepers reminds one that it was on September 21st Admiral Sir John Cunningham sent his warm congratulations to the officers and men of the 12th Minesweeping Flotilla for their outstanding work in sweeping 1,000 mines since their arrival in the Mediterranean in the winter of 1942. As constituted in September, 1944, the flotilla was under the command of Captain G. N. Rawlings in H.M.S. *Fly*, and consisted also of the *Albacore*, *Acute*, *Cadmus*, *Circe*, *Espiègle* and *Mutine*. The minesweeping record of those little ships was certainly remarkable—North Africa, the Sicilian Narrows, Sicily, Salerno, Anzio and the west coast of Italy. Their labours never ceased.

On board the *Cadmus* (Lieutenant-Commander John S. Landers, R.N.R.), was a well-known character called Charlie. He—or “she,” to be more correct—was an ordinary grey goose bought at Bizerta in June, 1943, to be fattened and eaten for their Christmas dinner by the petty officers. But so engaging were Charlie’s habits, so amiable her disposition, that she constituted herself the ship’s pet and remained so. She lived in a straw-lined coop on the boat-deck and answered to her name. She had her own particular friends, but a principal crony in the shape of the Chief Boatswain’s Mate, Petty Officer A. Kennedy, of Plymouth.

Charlie had the free run of the ship and flopped overboard when the hands were piped to bathe and friends whistled to her from the water. On one occasion she had an involuntary bath when the breeze got under her wings and tail feathers and whisked her overboard. The ship was at sea, so they piped "Goose overboard," and lowered a boat. Unperturbed, and swimming strongly, she was duly rescued.

Essentially a seagoing bird, Charlie detested the shore. When the *Cadmus* again visited Bizerta, she was carried to the foot of the gangway to enjoy the sights and smells of her old home town. She looked around her with a jaundiced eye, obviously unimpressed. Then her roving eye fell upon a squatting Arab, which stirred some half-forgotten chord in her memory. She didn't like Arabs, she decided, so flew at the man, flapping her wings and hissing with indignation. The Arab fled ignominiously, and Charlie, squawking with triumph, waddled up the gangway and back to the ship. People who saw her swore she wore a derisive smile.

Christmas Day came and went, and in January, 1944, perhaps as a thank offering, but certainly to the surprise of all her friends, Charlie suddenly took to laying eggs. The tally was duly entered in Petty Officer Kennedy's log—forty-one eggs in four months when I saw it.

But she was never rechristened Charlotte.

## II

When the port of Leghorn fell to Allied troops on July 19th, 1944, the British Naval Officer-in-Charge, Captain R. E. F. McQ. Mackenzie, and a small advance party of key personnel, who had been living under canvas at Piombino, at once moved forward. For the first few days Leghorn was still under enemy shell fire, but within ten days the whole port party had moved forward and the work of clearance and reconstruction had begun.

Leghorn was required as a base for a few destroyers, together with minesweepers and light coastal forces of the British

and American Navies. Its use was also necessary as a supply port for the Army. Like Naples, German demolition and wanton destruction, combined with the effects of Allied bombing, had reduced it to a virtual shambles.

The general enemy plan had been defence against seaborne invasion. As early as November, 1943, the Germans had created an extensive "Black Zone," and had compelled about three-quarters of the population living on the sea front, the dock area, and in the main shopping streets to leave their homes. Householders were allowed to remove furniture, and many firms took away their more important records. Lack of transport, however, compelled most people to leave their belongings behind in the hope that they would be safe. Thereafter, streets, grass verges, likely bivouac areas, beaches, and even the drives and gardens of the evacuated villas on the sea front were heavily and systematically mined by the enemy.

At first there was looting by individual Germans, while many Italians took the chance of helping themselves to their neighbours' property. But later the German pillage became official and systematic, machinery being carried off to the Reich, safes and vaults being blasted open, and furniture removed wholesale. Five full train loads of goods were sent off to Germany, while forty vans full of furniture were despatched "as a spontaneous gift from the generous citizens of Livorno to the bombed-out families of the Reich!" Later, when it became clear that the port must fall to the Allies, the Germans went from house to house smashing, destroying and ripping. Italians were allowed into the evacuated houses to take what they liked and break up what remained, while informers who told where valuables had been buried or walled up were allowed 20 per cent. of what was discovered.

The docks and quays had been extensively damaged, cranes blown down to block roads and canals, and the shipyard machinery sabotaged. The same applied to the power stations, whence much of the machinery was removed to Germany. The water supply had been put out of action, and at first drinking and washing water had to be brought from distant

points by road. Fresh water became a serious problem indeed when the civilians came drifting back to the squalor of their robbed and shattered homes.

In the port itself every ship of any size not already sunk by bombing was used to create formidable barriers in each of the two entrances. There were nine wrecks in each entrance, sunk with heavy charges which blew holes too large for under-water patching, and in an interlocking pattern to make clearance more difficult. Every tug in the port was sunk. Except for a few rowing boats found in odd places, there was nothing afloat.

For the first few weeks the clearance of mines and booby traps presented a major problem. There were various casualties through carelessness or foolhardiness. It took six months before the port area had finally been cleared of about 20,000 mines and booby traps. Long before that, however, much was done to repair and re-equip the dockyard, and to put the dry dock, full of debris with its walls and pumping machinery damaged, back into working order.

Leghorn was soon serving as an operational base for small warships and as a supply base for the Army. By January, 1945, apart from vehicles, fuel and personnel, the discharge of cargo for several months had averaged 5,600 tons a day of military stores, though at times it was as high as 9,000 tons a day.

The rehabilitation of Leghorn was no mean task. Apart from other problems, many Italian workers were employed. They had to be fed from Allied sources, while much had also to be done for the increasing local population, most of whom were destitute and on the verge of starvation.

Commander R. A. Allan, R.N.V.R., an officer of great experience who has already been mentioned in this narrative, was the senior officer directing the operations of the force of British M.T.Bs. and American P.Ts. operating from Leghorn. From the end of August, 1944, until the third week in September, when the Fifth and Eighth Armies were battling for Kesselring's 'Gothic Line,' the enemy was still relying upon shipping for the supply of his army. It was at night, close inshore along the coast, with the tall ridges of the Apennines



black against the sky, that crept the convoys of F-lighters and barges carrying the enemy's stores and munitions. The greater part of that eighty-mile stretch of coast from Genoa, through Spezia, to Viareggio was amply protected by guns of 6-inch calibre and downwards, some of which were mobile and could be moved as necessary along the coastwise road from Siestri Levante to the north. There were minefields offshore, and the Germans were well provided with location devices for spotting approaching ships and could illuminate whole areas of sea with flights of star-shell.

Mention has already been made of the work of the British and American light coastal craft operating in this area earlier in the year from Bastia; but it was here, during September, that the same party working from Leghorn destroyed at least sixteen enemy vessels or craft, with nine more "probables" and two damaged. Operations took place almost nightly, and cannot all be described in detail; but here are three fairly typical engagements.

On the dark, moonless night of September 12th-13th, a force under the command of Lieutenant A. H. Moore, R.N.V.R., who was on board the American P.T. 557 (Ensign W. Barnes, U.S.N.R.), was patrolling close inshore near Savona, one of the German supply ports. The other boats were M.T.B. 378 (Lieutenant N. L. Ilett, R.N.V.R.), and M.T.B. 421 (Lieutenant R. Aitchison, R.N.V.R.).

There was a visibility of about three-quarters of a mile, with a slight breeze, but no sea or swell, when at 11.15 p.m. our boats sighted four F-lighters at a range of about 1,500 yards. P.T. 557 at once swung in to attack, fired one torpedo at the second in the enemy line, and then, after a slight alteration of course, fired again at the fourth. The torpedoes hit, the first being accompanied by an explosion of "terrific violence" which sent masses of debris hurtling through the air. The second set the target on fire, and caused the smaller detonations of exploding ammunition. About thirty seconds later Ilett, in 378, fired torpedoes at the enemy's leader. The target was hit, and disintegrated. M.T.B. 421's shot unfortunately missed.

This part of the action occurred within a mile of the break-water at Savona, and three F-lighters, probably laden with ammunition for the German Army, had been destroyed in less than a minute.

Our boats retired seaward, and on comparing notes it was found that one of the enemy remained afloat. So P.T. 557 returned alone to the scene of the F-lighter on fire, with her ammunition still exploding. She was obviously finished and not worth another shot; but, searching round, P.T. 557 sighted the fourth lighter and fired another torpedo. It hit, and from the violence of the explosion the enemy was probably carrying ammunition also. The shore batteries opened up with star-shell and cannon fire, but none of our craft was hit.

In his report of this engagement, Moore, who had been an accountant in civil life and hailed from Barrow-in-Furness, drew particular attention to the good work of Ilett for his coolness and skill in attacks upon enemy shipping. Ilett, who was an Oxford undergraduate before the war, always pressed home his attacks to close range and had three definite "kills" to his credit. Ensign William Barnes of P.T. 577 was also praised by Moore for his "extreme coolness, skill and accuracy" in carrying out attacks which resulted in three torpedo hits on three different targets.

In the early hours of September 14th, with no moon, little wind and a calm sea, three light coastal craft under Lieutenant A. C. B. Blomfield, R.N., were patrolling close inshore to the south-eastward of Genoa. They were M.T.B. 422 (Lieutenant C. J. Cockrane, R.N.V.R.), M.T.B. 376 (Sub-Lieutenant G. R. Masters, R.N.V.R.) and P.T. 559 (Lieutenant R. E. Nagle, U.S.N.R.). At 2.45 a.m. these craft sighted three F-lighters, and went in to the attack. Torpedoes were fired, and though the full result could not be seen there was a heavy explosion accompanied by a sheet of flame. Three-quarters of an hour later they sighted an enemy corvette in company with more F-lighters. P.T. 559, with Blomfield on board, altered course and fired torpedoes. The corvette was hit in the stern, and a little later there was a violent explosion, probably caused

by the detonation of her magazine. When the smoke cleared away the enemy was badly on fire and settling by the stern. Heavy and accurate gunfire was opened on our boats by the F-lighters and another corvette to seaward, but, making smoke and zigzagging at high speed, they managed to escape without damage.

Another typical action of the period was that fought early in morning of September 27th by a force, again under the command of Lieutenant A. H. Moore, R.N.V.R., on board P.T. 559 (Lieutenant R. E. Nagle, U.S.N.R.). The other boats were M.T.B. 377 (Lieutenant R. Aitchison, R.N.V.R.) and M.T.B. 376 (Sub-Lieutenant G. R. Masters, R.N.V.R.).

The weather was fine with no moon when, at 1.15 a.m., they sighted an enemy convoy of three or four ships hugging the shore. Our boats turned in to engage, and at 1.21 a.m. all three of them fired torpedoes. How many hit was not reported; but two heavy explosions were heard as our craft moved seaward. After a few seconds there came a third very violent explosion accompanied by a sheet of flame several hundred feet high in which debris could be seen whirling high in the air. The whole sea became momentarily illuminated in almost blinding brilliance, and the torpedoed ship, about 300 feet long, was seen to break in two. From the upheaval and colour of the flame and the oily-looking clouds of black smoke she was probably carrying petrol. Our craft were heavily engaged as they zigzagged out of range at full speed, but once more managed to escape without injury.

### III

Allied Force Headquarters moved from Algiers to Caserta, some twenty miles outside Naples, in July, 1944. It was an upheaval, involving the transport of some 3,000 British and American officers of the Navy, Army and Air Force, and a great mass of records and material. A few went by air, but the greater number by sea.

One remembers that H.M.S. *Aurora* (Captain Geoffrey

Barnard), took a large number of Wren officers and ratings to Naples. Geoffrey Barnard had an original sense of humour. When the *Aurora* arrived under the shadow of Vesuvius preparatory to coming to anchor, not a man was visible on deck. There were long ranks of Wrens in immaculate white fallen in on the forecastle and quarter-deck, with a Wren officer, so my version of the story goes, holding up the little anchor flag on the bridge. When the ship reached her billet the lady dropped her flag, and the anchor plunged down with a rattle of cable. The blacksmith, with his heavy maul, had been lying prone on the forecastle ready to knock off the slip.

On the way in the *Aurora* passed close to a French cruiser, which I think was the *Gloire*. A whistle sounded, and the Wrens came smartly to attention, their skirts fluttering in the breeze. The *Gloire's* officers and men, we were told later, stared goggle-eyed in amazement and then rushed for telescopes and binoculars.

The Royal Navy had set a new fashion. At last it had broken tradition by manning a fighting cruiser entirely with women!

## IV

August, September and October, 1944, were particularly strenuous and fruitful months in the Adriatic. British light coastal craft were continually preying on the enemy convoys among the southern Dalmatian islands, while both here and on the mainland, destroyers, landing craft, minesweepers, motor launches and sundry other vessels were busily at work. This included the landing and covering of British Commando troops and bodies of Yugoslav partisans raiding the enemy strongholds and harassing his communications. Observation and raiding parties were frequently landed in secret behind the German lines and re-embarked later. These clandestine operations, which took place both in Dalmatia and Italy, were full of excitement and adventure, though nothing could be said about them at the time lest the Germans should become

aware of our methods. The story which follows is typical of many others.

One evening a burly figure in khaki appeared on board an L.C.T. lying at Manfredonia, on the Adriatic coast of Italy to the northward of Bari. He wore the uniform of a major of the British Army and many ribbons, and was, it seemed, the leader of a commando, or his own "private army," as he preferred to call it, of about sixty men and four officers. All the men were volunteers picked from almost every unit in the British Empire. They had to be tough, self-reliant, and completely fearless. Only one out of every eighty applicants was accepted, and each volunteer had to forfeit all rank and start afresh as a private. There was no extra pay, no special inducements except the thrill of fighting behind the enemy lines by methods peculiarly their own. They had already had three years of that sort of thing, starting in Egypt. The Major, as we may call him, was very much the autocrat. His movements and exploits had become so unorthodox, but so effective, that no regulations seemed to apply.

Anyhow, it seemed that a special operation had been approved by all the naval and military authorities concerned. The L.C.T. was to land the Major and his men on a beach ninety-three miles behind the German lines further up the coast of Italy. Once there they were to be left to do their damndest in their own tough way. They were to take twelve jeeps with them, super-jeeps provided with a great variety of fighting and technical equipment best calculated to annoy the enemy.

They proceeded to iron out the details in the L.C.Ts. wardroom, with a Commander, Royal Navy, holding a watching brief.

First, the beach. It was a small beach, barely fifty yards wide and more than a hundred miles away. Could the Navy guarantee to find it in pitch darkness at the appointed time?

The Navy, in the shape of the captain of the L.C.T. and the commanding officer of the M.L. who was going as escort, thought they could.

Good, said the Major. Then men would be landed to form a temporary bridgehead while he and his party drove ashore to stir up trouble for the enemy. There would be an Italian agent on the beach at the right time, by the way, and he would flash a red light to guide them in.

Were there any offshore sand bars, the L.C.T.'s captain wanted to know? The Major showed him a hand-drawn chart marked with soundings, observing that the beach had been examined and no off-lying obstructions were reported. There was a depth of 5 feet almost to the water's edge. A railway line passed within 50 yards of the beach, he went on to explain. A train went up and down. It would have to be watched for.

That was wonderful, said the L.C.T.'s captain. The train could be shot up. The M.L.'s captain agreed. He had a new set of Bofors guns, and was itching to try them out on a proper target.

"No, no!" the Commander protested. "There's nothing in the orders about shooting up trains. The operation's a dead secret. If we have an L.C.T. blazing off in the middle of it, you'll give the whole show away."

The Major thought otherwise. It was a good idea, he thought. He and his men would land. Then, when the train came along, the ships could shoot it up, and the Huns would think that was the whole object of the operation. Meanwhile, he and his jeeps would get away unseen.

"Yes, sir," said the L.C.T.'s captain. "If I get the Major and his people ashore, I can haul off, turn stern on to the shore, and give the train a pasting as it goes by. It'll be terrific."

"Oh, well," the Commander replied, still rather dubious. "If your guns are pointing in that direction, and if they happen to go off, I suppose there's nothing I can do about it." Really, he thought to himself, there was no holding some of these fire eating young officers when they saw the chance of having a crack at the enemy. And so it was arranged.

It was dark and calm when the L.C.T. slipped out to sea with her M.L. escort and turned her bows to the northward. They shaped a course which took them far out to sea, with

nothing but the misty blue peaks of the Apennines in sight far away to port when daylight came next morning. They were very careful about their reckoning. The patent log was streamed. They counted the revolutions of the engines and estimated the effect of the wind and current. All through that day they voyaged, and into the next evening, with the M.L. zigzagging ahead. Not a ship had been sighted, not a solitary aircraft. By 8 p.m., three hours early, they had reached the spot from which they must turn in towards the shore.

The captain of the L.C.T. asked the Major if he would prefer to be positive about landing on the right beach and take the chance of being seen, or not to be seen and perhaps to be a little bit out on the beach?

The Major preferred to be landed in exactly the right spot, so the M.L. was signalled and told to close the land and make certain of the place. The L.C.T. waited, and presently the M.L. returned to say she had found the place. She had fixed it by compass bearings of the mountain peaks.

The sun set, and after a short twilight the blue-black night came down. There was no moon, and hardly a breath of wind. The L.C.T. began her run-in towards the shore. The Commando troops got out their tommy-guns and gave them a last oiling and polish. The jeeps tuned up their engines, and the steel-helmeted ship's gunners peered ahead through their gun shields.

10.50 p.m. . . . 10.55 . . . 10.57. Then someone saw the red light winking ashore.

"Starboard five! . . . 'Midships! . . . Steady!" and the light came dead ahead.

They could now see the low, dark outline of the land. It was not far away. There came a heavy lurch as the ship slithered over a sandbank. It was ominous, particularly after what had been said about clear water. Then she swung violently to port as she hit another bank and clawed over it. They could see the line of surf now, ghostly white in the darkness.

"Slow ahead together," came the order. "Let go!" and the anchor splashed over the stern. "Stop together!" With a soft, crunching sound, the L.C.T. touched down on the beach.

The door went down, right at the feet of the man with the red lantern. The time was 11 p.m. exactly.

"Wonderful," said the Major. "Marvellous. I didn't think it could be done. Well, goodbye, and thank you."

That should have been the end of the adventure so far as the Navy was concerned, but it was only the beginning.

There was a road about 60 yards inland from the beach, and along it there came a long procession of headlights moving north. Convoys of Germans were on the move at a time when no enemy transport was expected. It looked like a retreat. At the same time, the L.C.T. started to swing into the wind, driven by the outfall of a river to starboard. It was gradually pushing her broadside on to the beach, and in water filled with sandbanks. It was not so good. They tried to hold her straight with the engines; but they had little effect.

The enemy traffic, meanwhile, passing interminably and so close that the brake noises could be heard, was frustrating the Major's party. A patrol trotted off, dodged across the road in a convenient gap between the traffic, and explored a road further inland. They were back in about half an hour. All the roads were blocked with dense traffic. The Germans were withdrawing in masses.

Then came a whistling scream and the crash of a heavy explosion. It was the Royal Air Force, just beginning to bomb a bridge about 500 yards away. What with Germans, British bombs, sandbanks, and a strong current doing its best to drive the ship ashore against her maximum engine-power, things were ticklish indeed.

"Captain," said the Major. "I'm sorry. I'll have to cancel the operation. I can't get the jeeps ashore in this."

So the L.C.T. captain gave the order, "Up door!" preparatory to hauling off. More bombs came hurtling down. The traffic stopped and switched off its lights.

"I think they'll see us, Major."

"Of course they'll see us. They can't help it. But in the German Army they say: 'I'm a lorry driver. Ships are none of my business!' They won't interfere."



They started to heave in the anchor, and went full astern on the engines, then emergency full astern with all the power they had. Nothing happened except that the anchor and sixty fathoms of wire came home through the soft sand. Using the engines, they tried straightening the ship, now forced to a hideous angle to the beach. But she still gave way to the current, inch by inch.

They lowered a boat and tried to lay out the anchor again; but after rowing like furies for fifteen minutes made no more than 6 yards. The L.C.T. was immovable, and time was slipping by. At any moment some inquisitive German might come down the beach to find a whole ship with all her gear and equipment. Was it worth while striving to get her off, or should she be destroyed before the enemy came down in force? A limit must be set on the effort to save her, lest by doing so she were merely preserved to be captured intact.

The Captain of the L.C.T. was still trying to decide on his proper course of action when night was suddenly turned into day . . . radiant white light. Every man froze where he was. It was the R.A.F., dropping flares to see if they had hit the bridge. More and more flares followed the first.

At 1 a.m., by which time they had been ashore for two hours under the noses of the Germans, the order was given to burn and destroy. The M.L. could not be contacted, and in any case could not tow 550 tons of inert L.C.T. off her sandy bed.

So food and arms were brought up, and the sailors changed into their thickest clothing and boots. Counting the soldiers, there were 140 men all told, and they were split up into twelve parties, each under an officer. The idea was to land and hide until the Eighth Army appeared, which, incidentally, did not happen until six weeks later. The orders were obeyed to the letter. The discipline of the Army units was perfect.

Then, gazing seaward, the captain of the L.C.T. saw a blacker patch in the darkness. It was the M.L. Approaching to see what was happening, she had grounded 500 yards out. The commanding officer of the L.C.T. paddled over on a float, and the M.L.'s captain, an enthusiast, said he could take

everybody. He finally promised to leave at daylight with what men could be transferred by that time. But he had no boat. The L.C.T. had one dinghy and two Carley floats.

The L.C.T. captain returned to his stranded ship. A Commando Captain was put in charge of the dinghy, and pushed off with five men with full equipment before he could be checked in the darkness. The floats pushed off with Army personnel, and one or two more confident swimmers were allowed to get away. The dinghy, meanwhile, did not return for an hour. The five hearty Commandos had all stepped out at the same time and capsized it.

At 3 a.m. there were still eighty-four men in the L.C.T., all clutching their treasured private and personal automatic weapons and watching the traffic streaming steadily along the road. They were smoking the Major's cigars, which he had distributed. The Royal Air Force had departed.

It became clear that by no means all the men could be ferried to the M.L. before daylight if they relied only on the dinghy and the Carley floats. At the best, it was a slow process. All those who were any good as swimmers must take to the water and swim that 500 yards. But they could improvise life-belts, and in an incredibly short time, working like fiends, they stripped the wheels and spare wheels off the twelve jeeps and helped themselves to the inner tubes. After each man had been questioned as to his confidence, fifty-three splashed into the sea and started off. It was lucky that it was summer and the water was pleasantly warm for bathing.

That left thirty-one in the L.C.T., who set about laying explosive charges to wreck the engines and to destroy the ship's hull and all the vehicles. Instruments were smashed, and all papers and documents, even the N.A.A.F.I. receipts, burnt. The meagre ration of beer was distributed, the rum placed under guard, and cigarettes given away in cartons. The rearguard were now having the time of their lives, and in case the Germans came down the beach to see what was going on each man had four automatic rifles.

More and more people left the L.C.T. in the dinghy and the

Carley floats, and as the first crimson streaks of dawn came creeping over the horizon to the eastward, her captain made a final tour of his ship, hauled down the White Ensign, and departed. The fuses were set. In an hour the ship would be destroyed. The Germans would never use her.

The M.L.'s engines were turning over as he gripped her handrail with his feet still trailing in the water. "Buck up!" yelled the M.L.'s commanding officer as he turned hard-a-port with his engines roaring.

There was need for haste. The expected train was approaching!

The Bofors guns burst into their banging stutter. The tracer curved shorewards. At a range of about 600 yards, the shooting was easy. Bits and pieces began to fly. The engine suddenly stopped in a cloud of steam and smoke. More shell swept along the line of trucks. On shore there was bedlam.

The M.L. had done what her young captain wanted to do. With her deck and every compartment below crowded with 155 officers and men, she turned and made seaward at full speed. Not a man was left behind. Fourteen hours later they were back in Manfredonia.

## V

August, September and October, 1944, saw great naval activity in the Adriatic and among the Dalmatian Islands. Day after day the brief naval communiqués announced raids by our light coastal craft which resulted in the sinking of the vessels carrying enemy stores and supplies.

Flotillas under the command of men like Lieutenant-Commander T. J. Bligh, J. D. Lancaster, Barlow, Hyslop, all of the R.N.V.R., with T. G. Fuller and Maitland of the R.C.N. V.R., savaged the German convoys from the Gulf of Venice south to Corfu. Nowhere were the enemy vessels safe from attack.

The details of most of these engagements were very late in reaching us; but here are the accounts of one or two of the actions.

On the evening of August 7th, Bligh, in M.G.B. 662, with M.T.Bs. 667 and 670, commanded respectively by Lieutenants C. J. Jerram and E. Hewitt, R.N.V.R., were patrolling off an island to the north of Zadar (Zara) on the coast of Yugoslavia. Dark and moonless, the weather was fine with a slight breeze and a visibility of about one and a half miles.

Soon after 10 p.m. a dark shape was sighted to the southward through binoculars, and a little later the single ship resolved itself into a convoy of three vessels, two of which were F-lighters. Bligh decided he would first make a gun attack, and then sink any disabled ship with torpedoes.

Within twelve minutes the enemy was altering course to close the land, so Bligh moved out to engage, fire being opened at 10.16 p.m. at a range of about 350 yards. The nearest F-lighter promptly opened up a heavy return fire on 662, scoring immediate hits. One of the M.G.B.'s engines was put out of action and another damaged, while other shell caused ten casualties and started a fire. But 662's gunners did not falter. With those of M.T.B. 667, which was in close station, they continued to pour a concentrated and accurate rain of shell into the enemy. The F-lighter, with all her guns silenced, presently burst into flame.

Events followed each other with almost lightning rapidity. The second F-lighter was trying to escape, so M.T.B. 670 was ordered to attack with torpedoes, while 667 was told to be ready to take the damaged 662 in tow. The situation was serious. The enemy batteries ashore had opened fire with sufficient accuracy to be incommoding.

At 10.26 M.T.B. hit her target with a torpedo, and the F-lighter blew up in the usual heartening upheaval of spray and smoke mingled with fire. On board 662, meanwhile, all the fires had been put out, holes plugged with rags, and the casualties attended to. One man had been killed, and the nine wounded were treated by Captain B. Keefe of the Royal Army Medical Corps, who was on board as a passenger "in case he could be useful." Though 662's engine-room was filled with fumes, she could still hobble, so, after telling his other two

boats to finish off the burning F-lighter, to collect survivors, and to look for the enemy small craft which had made off early in the action, Bligh withdrew. No trace of the third vessel was seen, but seventeen Germans were rescued from the water and the blazing F-lighter subjected to close range gunfire until she rolled over and sank.

This most resolute and satisfactory action in the face of heavy opposition was fought in the best tradition of the light coastal forces. The rapidity with which the enemy became demoralized was due entirely to the steadiness of the British gun's crews under heavy fire. The two F-lighters were heavily armed, and, apart from many German military passengers, carried motor transport, a wireless van, mail for the enemy garrisons, and a considerable quantity of oil.

On the night of August 17th-18th three M.T.Bs. were ordered to carry out an offensive sweep off the coast of Istria, on the eastern side of the Gulf of Venice. Lieutenant-Commander J. D. Lancaster, R.N.V.R., was in command on board M.T.B. 295, whose captain was Lieutenant H. S. Cassidy, of the Royal Australian Naval Volunteer Reserve. The other boats were M.T.B. 371 (Lieutenant B. G. Syrett, R.N.V.R.) and M.T.B. 297 (Lieutenant J. R. Woods, R.C.N.V.R.).

Shortly before midnight the three boats reached their patrol ground after passing through a fleet of fishing craft, burning lights, spread out over several miles. There was no wind or sea, very dark with no moon, and the visibility reduced by a low mist which had obscured the horizon at sunset. At 1.25 a.m., when off Rovigno, some flares were seen ashore, followed about ten minutes later by a cluster of red stars. It was time to think of returning if the boats were to be clear of the area by daylight in accordance with their orders. Lancaster, indeed, was on the point of withdrawing when the lookouts suddenly reported a ship close inshore. She was about three-quarters of a mile away, steaming to the southward—a vessel of about 5,000 tons, deeply laden.

Lancaster went in to attack, and 295 fired her torpedoes. There followed what he described as a "considerable" explosion

abast the merchant ship's funnel. A minute or so later there were more explosions as 371's torpedoes went home. The unhappy ship sank stern first.

It was a bloodless victory, nevertheless "a cause of great satisfaction to the flotilla that their intrusion into these waters should be rewarded so soon by so handsome a prize," as Lancaster wrote. It made up for a long period of arduous and rather unspectacular work among the intricate channels of the Dalmatian Islands.

Further south on this same night, August 17th-18th, Lieutenant-Commander Maitland, R.C.N.V.R., in M.G.B. 657, with M.G.Bs. 658 (Lieutenant C. Burke, R.C.N.V.R.) and 663 (Lieutenant T. E. Lander, R.C.N.V.R.), met a convoy of eight enemy craft while on patrol in the Mljet Channel, near Dubrovnik. They at once engaged, and in a fierce battle lasting three hours definitely sank one E-boat, one store-carrier, two large heavily armed flak schooners, and a lighter carrying oil fuel. An F-lighter was also damaged and was sunk at dawn by the R.A.F. Four E-boats which formed part of the escort fled at top speed. We had no casualties, and our boats suffered no more than superficial damage.

But the classic engagement of this period was that fought by Bligh on the night of October 11th-12th. He was again in M.G.B. 662, and had with him M.T.Bs. 634 (Lieutenant W. E. A. Blount, R.N.V.R.), 637 (Lieutenant R. C. Davidson, R.N.V.R.) and 638 (Lieutenant D. Lummis, R.N.V.R.).

The flotilla left its base on October 10th and proceeded northward, and that evening, acting on information received, lay stopped close to Vir Island, north of Zadar. It so happened that the enemy chose that night for a bombardment and demonstration off an island some miles to the westward. Our boats saw the firing and went off to intercept; but the enemy had probably made off at high speed to the northward immediately after the engagement so that no contact was made. However, it seemed likely that the demonstration portended some important enemy movement the next night. Hope ran high, and it was not disappointed.

After dark on the 11th Bligh's four boats again lay concealed under the dark shadow of the coast of Vir Island. The sea was glassily calm with very low visibility when, at 10.45 p.m., all the craft started to roll heavily as though from the wash of a passing ship. They at once got under way, and the first sudden sight of the enemy, which proved to be four F-lighters, was made at 400 yards.

The next ten minutes were so hectic and confused that it is difficult to describe them. Bligh himself, in 662, was engaging many targets on the port side, including F-lighters, armed barges and E-boats. Very heavy fire was coming his way from a number of enemy vessels. It was all high; but the gun flashes and streams of tracer had a blinding effect on the bridge. He saw a barge hit and blow up, starting a petrol fire on the water. In the glare of star-shell, he glimpsed an F-lighter being heavily hit by his pom-pom and Oerlikon. All his guns were firing, and in the light of the petrol fire he saw an E-boat hit by the .303-inch Vickers on his bridge, burst into flame and explode. On his port quarter was an F-lighter at a range of about 400 yards. She was unilluminated and almost invisible, even through binoculars; but was repeatedly hit by another of his guns. "Everywhere on the port side," Bligh said, "there were burning ships and explosions. There were visible many more ships than the original four F-lighters. The sight was fantastic."

The action was being fought at ranges down to 40 yards, and as it appeared later our force had engaged at the very moment when enemy northbound and southbound convoys were passing each other. This, on top of an attack out of the blue, added considerably to the doubt and confusion of the Germans. They hardly knew which way to turn.

Blount, in 634, had much the same experience as his leader. He opened up with all his guns on the F-lighter engaging 662. As he turned, at a range of less than 50 yards, his little ship was hit in a ready-use ammunition locker, which exploded and started a fire. It was promptly extinguished by Able Seaman Fred Smith. "All our guns continued to pour an intensive fire into the F-lighter, which burst into flame from

stem to stern," Blount wrote. "Her bridge collapsed and she appeared to be breaking in two. . . . Then another F-lighter, followed by two more, appeared very close to seaward of the one on fire. My guns fired on the middle and last one, and fires were started in both. . . . Astern of the southgoing F-lighter appeared what looked like an E-boat. . . . She was engaged . . . and was seen by me to explode and disappear. . . ." A little later he saw an F-lighter sink in a cloud of steam.

Davidson, in 637, opened fire with all his guns at about 70 yards. "None of our guns could miss . . . our target immediately caught fire. . . . The after superstructure of this vessel resembled Wembley Stadium on a dark night, except for the Nazi flag. Our gunners reduced it to a blazing wreck." A little later, too, Davidson saw two dark objects which turned out to be capsized vessels.

Lummis, of 638, sighted four vessels in the glare of the fires, and opened up with every gun he had. As he said, "We sank one with Oerlikon and concentrated on an F-lighter at 200 yards. Shells could be seen ripping open her side. This target was left burning fiercely, and fire was directed on another F-lighter, which was hit with all guns and set on fire. An E-boat appeared on the starboard quarter, and was hit with the Oerlikon. . . ."

This phase of the action lasted about twenty minutes. When the firing died away two F-lighters had been sunk, two set on fire, and another seriously damaged and probably sunk. Three armed barges and one E-boat had also been destroyed, and two E-boats damaged.

It was a good night's work; but Bligh was no believer in half measures. There were other enemy craft about, so he led his boats off on a sweep to the west and south to scoop up anything that remained. Their persistence was rewarded. Three-quarters of an hour later they found another F-lighter and a smaller craft close inshore. Our craft opened fire. The lighter was sunk, and the smaller craft badly hit. Another F-lighter, invisible against the dark background of the shore, betrayed her presence by opening fire. She also was engaged.



For the next two hours, with deliberate cunning, Bligh lay off. He was waiting for the moon to rise. The remainder of the enemy vessels were probably sheltering under the dark coast, where they were practically invisible to him. On the other hand, they could see his craft. So it was not until the rising moon shed some light on the scene that he crept in to the coast and swept along within 50 yards of the shore. His patience, good seamanship and accurate appreciation were rewarded. Three more F-lighters were found and engaged at short range, two being torpedoed and the third set ablaze by gunfire. Another armed store-carrier and what looked like an E-boat were also sunk.

It was during this part of the action that Bligh decided to close the small part of the hull of the torpedoed F-lighter to see if he could identify her. Thick smoke was being carried seaward by the gentle breeze. He took 662 through it, and, in his own words, "had the shock of my career to find myself at about 50 feet from a beached convoy of two F-lighters and some small craft." He at once engaged, and the other three boats came in to assist.

From first to last the series of actions covered five hours, the actual firing covering three periods of about twenty, five and forty minutes. To the Germans it was a holocaust. At the most conservative estimate, smitten again and again, the enemy lost six F-lighters sunk and one probably sunk: four store-carriers sunk; one E-boat definitely, and another probably, sunk, with two more badly damaged. Most of them were heavily laden, at least one with petrol and another with ammunition.

In spite of the heavy return fire from the F-lighters, which were observed to mount 88-mm. and quadruple, twin and single 20-mm. guns, our losses amounted to no more than one man killed and three wounded, with damage to the boats which could only be described as superficial.

As Bligh wrote, "This decisive victory was made possible by low visibility, land background, uncertainty of identification on the part of the enemy, absurdly close ranges, excellent gunnery and admirable coolness on the part of the three

following commanding officers." He did not add that there was another factor which made possible the success, his own brilliant and inspiring leadership and determination.

He was to have another victory in the early morning of October 21st, near Zadar, when with his own and four other M.T.Bs. he met and engaged another convoy of four large enemy craft. Two were sunk, two captured and ninety-five prisoners taken. On the same day another enemy craft laden with stores and ammunition was found north of Pelagosa Island, in mid-Adriatic. There were no signs of her crew, and she was boarded and taken into harbour. It appeared that all these craft had sailed from Dubrovnik before its occupation by the Partisans. One gun-lighter, another store-carrier and a small craft had scuttled themselves, and a further gun-lighter sank on passage. On October 22nd twenty-eight German seamen were picked up from another store-carrier about thirty miles east of Ancona.

It was during this period of intensive small ship warfare that the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Sir John Cunningham, made a signal congratulating the light coastal forces working in the Gulf of Genoa and the Adriatic. He had watched their operations with pleasure, and their constant harassing of the enemy's convoys had had a distinct bearing on the successes of the Allied troops fighting ashore. High praise, he added, was due to those whose constant vigilance, daring and skill had resulted in the destruction of many tons of enemy shipping. Much credit was also due to the base personnel who had maintained our craft in fighting condition.

Minesweeping in the intricate channels among the Dalmatian Islands began in September, 1944, as the German garrisons came to be evacuated. The narrow waterways were densely mined, and the dangerous work was carried out by B.Y.M.S. and motor launches. Between September 20th and 30th, B.Y.M.S. 2009, the Greek-manned B.Y.M.S. 2185 and 2087, M.L. 841 and the harbour-defence M.Ls. 1163 and 1241 swept 198 mines forming part of the defence fields laid by the Germans in three of the channels in the southern

Dalmatian Islands. The work was later continued for the purpose of opening the seaways to the ports of Dubrovnik, Split, Sibenik and Zadar.

## VI

Late in September raiding parties of troops were being landed in Albania to harass the withdrawal of the German garrisons. At dusk on October 4th H.M.S. *Wilton* bombarded enemy batteries on the island of Corfu before its occupation by British troops, while on the 5th, in support of the Army, L.C.Gs. successfully bombarded enemy positions on the mainland north of the island. On the 8th and 9th the destroyers *Wilton* and *Belvoir*, with L.C.Gs. 8 and 12, again fired upon German batteries and troop concentrations in the same area.

British landing craft and a motor launch eventually entered Corfu Harbour in the late evening of October 12th. They received a most friendly reception from Greek troops, the few Germans that remained having surrendered.

H.M.L.C.P.(R.) 735 (Landing Craft Personnel, Ramped) was one of the small craft engaged in the combined operations which led to the capture of Sarande, on the coast of Albania north of Corfu, after much hard fighting. She was under the command of Petty Officer Robert James Norris.

His craft carried an Army officer of the Psychological Warfare Branch, Captain Jeremy C. P. Elwes, and loud-speaker equipment, and at 4.30 a.m. on the evening of October 9th they left a bay two miles to the northward for the purpose of broadcasting to the German garrison of Sarande. Twenty minutes after sailing, while it was still dark, they sighted a heavily-armed Siebel ferry crowded with Germans. At 5 a.m., after making certain of her identity, 735 opened fire with her single Lewis gun, while Captain Elwes hailed the enemy to surrender. What he said we do not know; but it was an act of amazing effrontery. The Siebel ferry could have blown 735 out of the water, but nothing of the sort happened. In Norris' own words: "Spotted Germans waving white flags and so ceased fire."

Beaching their little craft near the enemy, the handful of British proceeded to disarm their prisoners. Then, with Leading Seaman MacGregor, Norris boarded the Siebel ferry to search for more Germans, but found none. At 5.30, by which time it was starting to become light, they were shelled by an enemy battery. Norris and Leading Stoker Archer were ashore guarding the prisoners, so to safeguard 735, MacGregor on his own initiative took her further south and beached her in a cove out of range of the guns.

At six o'clock Elwes joined Norris, and presently went off to find some British troops to take charge of the prisoners. Soldiers arrived and marched the Germans away, though not before British rocket-firing aircraft "strafed" the beach area, and Norris had a narrow escape. As spasmodic gunfire still continued, the petty officer remained under cover, his instructions from an Army officer being to remain by the captured Siebel ferry. At 7.30 he saw a suspicious-looking craft approaching from the direction of Corfu. It was fired upon and turned southward, finally proceeding towards the sheltered cove where 735 was beached.

At nine o'clock, as all firing had ceased, Norris started to walk to the cove with the intention of telling MacGregor to bring his craft back to the beach where the Siebel ferry lay. He had nearly reached it when he was surprised by a German Army officer, who fired a revolver and wounded him in the right shoulder. Norris fell to the ground, and the officer fired two more shots, both of which missed. Then a German soldier appeared and carried the petty officer to a craft lying on a beach nearby. This turned out to be the "suspicious" craft already mentioned, and on arriving Norris was closely examined as to the strength and dispositions of any British Army units in the vicinity. Apart from giving his name, he refused to answer any questions.

The enemy craft then moved off to another cove further south, and Norris was bandaged and made comfortable by a German soldier and went to sleep. At 3 p.m. he awoke and was fed on black bread and cold coffee. Two hours later, to use his

own words, "I was informed by a German Army officer that he intended to infiltrate through the British lines, and did not know what to do with me. He drew his revolver from its holster and I thought at first he intended to shoot me; but he decided not to, and pushed me off in a boat minus oars and the starting handle of the engine. I attempted to regain the shore; but was immediately fired upon by the German officer. The wind was offshore and the boat rapidly drifted seawards."

At eight o'clock in the evening it started to rain heavily, while the wind rose and the sea began to get rough. Wounded, Norris could do little to help himself. The boat gradually filled, and at two next morning she sank. Luckily a bottom board floated to the surface. Norris clung to it for his life, taking off his boots and socks.

He held on for three hours, thinking, no doubt, that he could never survive. Then at about 5 a.m., as dawn was approaching, he sighted two craft coming towards him from the southward. Shouting for help, he was picked up, stripped of his clothing and dried with a towel. The craft was an armed German lighter, where they attended to his wound, gave him hot coffee and cigarettes, and dressed him in a suit of German naval uniform.

Three-quarters of an hour later, hearing the sound of gunfire, he crawled on deck, to find a British destroyer shelling both the enemy craft. Her shooting was much too accurate to be pleasant, so the commanding officer of the lighter decided to give in. Norris, asked if he could semaphore, said that he could, so was told to signal to the destroyer announcing the surrender. He was so overcome by exhaustion that he had to be supported to do so.

Firing ceased, and the lighter, filled with Germans, went alongside the destroyer. She turned out to be H.M.S. *Belvoir*, where Norris, completely exhausted and wearing enemy uniform, had the greatest difficulty in convincing his countrymen that he was British. However, he finally managed to do so, and was taken below and cared for and fed in the sick-bay.

Robert James Norris must have been born under a lucky

#### MISCELLANY

star. No other man can have had the unforgettable experience of capturing a Siebel ferry with a Lewis gun and a loud-hailer, of being wounded, captured and narrowly escaping drowning, of being rescued by the enemy and arranging the surrender of the craft that picked him up, all in the space of twenty-four hours.

## CHAPTER XVIII

THE NAVY IN THE DODECANESE AND  
ÆGEAN

1943-1944

## I

THOUGH the Ægean cannot in any sense be regarded as part of the Western Mediterranean, which is the main subject of this book, the naval operations there which resulted in the final liberation of Greece and of the islands were undertaken by the ships of the Mediterranean Fleet. When Admiral Sir John Cunningham became Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, in October, 1943, he was relieved as Commander-in-Chief, Levant, by Vice-Admiral Sir Algernon Willis. In December Sir Algernon was recalled to the Admiralty on appointment as Second Sea Lord, and the Levant ceased to be a separate command. Vice-Admiral Sir Bernard Rawlings became Flag Officer, Levant and Eastern Mediterranean, with his headquarters at Alexandria. On October 30th, 1944, Sir Bernard Rawlings was relieved by Vice-Admiral W. G. Tennant.

In May, 1941, when the Balkans, Greece and Crete were overrun by the Germans, the more important Greek islands in the Ægean were occupied by the Axis. While the Germans reserved Crete and the Cyclades to themselves, they also reinforced the Italian garrisons in Rhodes and Scarpanto. These, with Stampalia, Kos and Leros, were fortified. Rhodes and Kos had good airfields, which, with the other airfields in Crete and Greece, constituted a threat to the British sea communications in the eastern Mediterranean.

Direct British assistance to the Greeks had begun in 1942. One of the main Axis supply lines from Central Europe to

Rommel's army in Cyrenaica ran from Jugoslavia to the Greek ports of Salonika, Patras, the Piræus and Kalamata. The work of the Royal Navy, particularly of the submarines, in cutting the sea portion of this supply line in the Ægean and across the Mediterranean is hardly germane to this present narrative. The Navy and Royal Air Force were also landing and dropping by parachute small parties of men of the Raiding Support Reserve in Greece for the purpose of organizing and carrying out the sabotage of the German supply line on land by all the means in their power. This handful of brave men, working with Greek guerrillas, continued their work until the liberation of Greece in October, 1944.

When Italy capitulated in September, 1943, it was hoped that Turkey might elect to enter the war on the side of the Allies. She did not. It had also been anticipated that the Italian garrisons in the Dodecanese would rally and disarm the Germans. Estimates varied, but according to one account there were 18,000 Italian troops in Rhodes to about 8,000 Germans, while another report estimated the total Italian force in the Dodecanese as about 60,000 and the German no more than 7,000. In any case, the Germans were greatly outnumbered. However, bewildered by the turn of events and lacking both leadership and morale, the Italians hesitated and were themselves disarmed. If something were to be done in the Dodecanese, Britain must act alone.

As was explained later at a Press conference by the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, it was decided to occupy the islands of Kos, Leros and Samos, north of Rhodes, all of which were garrisoned by Italians alone. This, it was said, would create a diversion, and would place us conveniently on the flank of the enemy's sea communications with Crete, Scarpanto and Rhodes. Kos had its airfield, while Leros had a harbour which had served as a naval base for the Italians and might also be useful for us.

By September 16th, 1943, with the co-operation of the Navy and the Air Force, British troops had been landed in the three islands. A small garrison was also installed at Castellorizo, a





THE AEGEAN.

little island 100 miles east of Rhodes and about five miles off the Turkish mainland.

The decision to occupy Kos, Leros and Samos was made on the highest level. For the next two months the maintenance of these British troops involved the Navy in a series of the most hazardous operations in the eastern Mediterranean since the evacuation of Greece and Crete, or the maintenance of Tobruk or Malta.

The German reaction was swift and violent. Troops were withdrawn from the Balkans and Crete to recapture the islands, while aircraft were brought down from Europe. The Germans had a definite superiority in the air. To reach Kos, Leros or Samos, ships had to pass east or west of Scarpanto, or even north of Rhodes, as the situation demanded, which, with the area to the north, was covered by enemy aircraft from Rhodes and Crete. The object was for ships to be 100 miles away from enemy airfields by dawn, which was seldom possible. The enemy airfields were bombed by the Royal Air Force, though lack of aircraft and the distance of our airfields militated against heavy or consistent attacks. Rhodes and Scarpanto were bombarded by the Royal Navy; but ships working in the area by daylight had to run the gauntlet of the JU.88's, the Stukas and the Messerschmitts. There was a lack of fighter cover.

After several days of heavy bombardment from the air, with the dive-bombers making repeated attacks upon the airfield and its runways, the enemy launched an air and seaborne attack against Kos before dawn on October 3rd. By October 5th, in spite of their resistance, the defenders had been overwhelmed and Kos, with its all-important airfield, passed into the hands of the Germans.

On October 6th the enemy reported heavy air attacks on Leros. They portended an attempt to capture the island, for on the night of the 6th-7th the cruisers *Sirius* (Captain P. W. B. Brooking) and *Penelope* (Captain G. D. Belben), with two destroyers, discovered a German invasion convoy off Stampalia, and sank all the landing craft and their escorts. That

success delayed the enemy's descent upon Leros for the time being, though the island was still subjected to heavy air raids.

It was the usual routine for two cruisers and some destroyers to slip into the Ægean by night; the cruisers providing cover and a certain amount of protection against aircraft, and the destroyers carrying troops, ammunition and supplies. Moving on through the maze of islands, the destroyers reached Leros and transferred their cargoes to *caiques* or lighters, which took them ashore. Landing men and stores often went on with flare-dropping aircraft overhead and the bombs coming down. Remaining only long enough to embark the wounded, the destroyers sailed to join others in a search for enemy craft round the neighbouring islands, and then steamed southward at high speed in an endeavour to be clear of the area before dawn and under fighter cover by daylight.

With Kos in enemy hands, the problem was whether to evacuate Leros and Samos, or to hold on and hope for the best. The final decision was to hold on, and to reinforce the garrison and build up the defences. Once more, as in the earlier days in Norway, Greece and Crete, the Navy and the troops were called upon to fight without adequate air protection.

Leros is no more than nine miles long by about three miles wide at its broadest. It has three deep indentations which reduce the width in two places to about half and three-quarters of a mile. Except for the beaches at the head of the coves the serrated coastline is mostly steep cliff. Inland the ground runs up in a series of rocky, scrub-covered ridges some 500 to 600 feet high, with deep valleys in between. The island had been well fortified by the Italians, who provided the major part of the garrison. To cut short a painful and complicated story, the all-out air attack on this small island started on October 27th, and on November 12th the long-expected invasion came just before dawn. Wave after wave of dive-bombers pinned down the defenders. Though many of the approaching landing craft were destroyed and their occupants drowned, enemy troops got ashore and established a bridgehead. Parachutists followed, then more enemy reinforcements by sea. After five days of

fighting the island passed into enemy hands. To the north, the garrison of Samos was withdrawn without loss.

There was a war correspondent in Leros during those last few days, Mr. Marsland Gander, of the *Daily Telegraph*. In his fine series of despatches he described the enemy landing craft coming in through a smoke-screen, how some were hit and sunk, and one blew up with a great mushroom explosion. He told of the low-flying attacks by the Stukas, the landing of parachutists, and the encouragement to the troops when a formation of Beaufighters came in to attack. He mentioned a motor minesweeper coming into the harbour at ten o'clock at night with fifty soldiers, and of how, at 4 a.m. next morning, with the moon overhead, he saw a destroyer creeping in towards the quay. On reflection, as he wrote later, "it seemed crazy to expect a destroyer to enter an enclosed harbour" which was no more than twenty-five miles from the German airfields at Kos and barely two miles from another enemy-occupied island, particularly when one-third of Leros was in German hands. But she came, nevertheless—H.M.S. *Echo* (Lieutenant-Commander R. H. C. Wyld).

She drew alongside, and to quote Mr. Gander's words—"we saw the last act of a drama, the last desperate attempt to save Leros. Chutes and ladders were let down to the quayside. Soldiers with their heavy packs slid or climbed off. Ammunition and supplies were dumped ashore. The men filed off into the shadows, and the supplies were whisked away. It was all finished in twenty minutes."

Mr. Gander embarked in this ship, and on her way out the *Echo* came upon a large enemy landing craft caught in the ray of a searchlight. She was crammed with troops, guns and vehicles. The destroyer opened fire, and the batteries ashore chimed in. The *Echo*, with her own weapons blazing, dodged the "overs" from the shore guns. The landing craft was hit and hit again. She stopped dead and burst into flames. That was the end of her.

Meanwhile the brightening sky in the east heralded the approach of dawn, and the *Echo* steamed at her utmost speed

to the southward to be clear of the dangerous area by daylight, when the Stuka attacks usually started. On her way she had a close-up view of an engagement between two M.T.Bs. and a German landing craft—the first M.T.B. using her machine-guns, and the second dodging across the enemy's bows to drop a depth-charge. It exploded in an upheaval of smoke and spray. When the turmoil subsided the landing craft had vanished from sight.

Later on the *Echo* received a signal from the Commander-in-Chief, Levant: "Well done. The arrival of those troops should make all the difference." Some hours afterwards, however, she had signals to the effect that more German landing craft had been sighted near Leros, while later still they overheard an ominous message to collect all landing craft and prepare to evacuate Leros.

One is not aware how many men succeeded in escaping; but it was the end. The devotion and self-sacrificing gallantry of the defending troops and of the men of the Navy had been in vain.

The German losses are known to have been very heavy. Many of their landing craft were sunk before touching down. According to one account, at least 1,000 of their troops were drowned before reaching the beaches—a large proportion considering the comparatively small numbers engaged. Many others were killed on landing, or in the confused fighting that followed. Nevertheless, we could not claim a victory.

However, at a time when the Allies were struggling to obtain a firm foothold in Italy, and to reconstruct Naples and other ports, the diversion of more than 200 operational enemy aircraft to the Ægean must have been a substantial help to the Allied troops engaged in the Italian campaign.

## II

The story of the Royal Navy in the Dodecanese between September and November, 1943, deserves to be written in full by one who was present. I lack many of the particulars. But the *Luftwaffe* made a dead set at the ships, and the cruisers

*Aurora*, *Sirius* and *Penelope*, with the anti-aircraft cruiser *Carlisle*, were all bombed and damaged, with considerable loss of life. Of the cruisers which took part in the operations only the *Phæbe* was not hit.

Many destroyers took part in the operations for the relief of Kos and Leros, and in offensive sweeps against enemy shipping, under constant bombing from enemy aircraft. They included the *Jervis*, *Intrepid*, *Echo*, *Faulknor*, *Fury*, *Pathfinder*, *Penn*, *Petard*, *Eclipse*, *Belvoir*, *Hurworth*, *Hursley*, *Beaufort*, *Rockwood*, *Dulverton*, *Easton*, *Croome*, *Aldenham*, *Blencathra*, with the Greek *Queen Olga*, *Adrias* and *Miaoulis*, and the Polish *Krakowiak*. Of these the *Intrepid*, *Queen Olga* and *Dulverton* were sunk in bombing attacks, the *Eclipse* was mined, and the *Hurworth* was lost in a minefield when going to the rescue of the *Adrias*, which had had her bows blown off. Lieutenant G. H. D. Legard, R.N., of the *Dulverton* was later awarded the M.B.E. for undaunted courage in saving the life of a wounded officer when the ship was lost and he himself was wounded.

The *Intrepid* (Commander C. A. de W. Kitcat), and the *Queen Olga*, of the Royal Hellenic Navy, were the first destroyers to enter Leros Harbour on September 26th. It was intended that they should stay there for the day under cover of the anti-aircraft defences. Within forty minutes they were both sunk by aircraft attack. They had heavy casualties, and the British and Greek dead were buried by the people of the little village nearby, who tend the graves and each year, on September 26th, make a pilgrimage of homage to the cemetery.

We have eye-witness accounts of a few other incidents. On a night in October the *Hursley* (Lieutenant-Commander W. J. P. Church), in company with the Greek *Miaoulis*, was searching for enemy shipping among the bays and inlets of some of the islands. It was at 2 a.m., in brilliant moonlight, that the two ships moved silently into a narrow cove fringed by steep, tall cliffs. They sighted two E-boats lying close inshore. Opening fire at 600 yards, they were soon hitting, and the last they saw of the enemy crews was when they were

hurriedly abandoning ship and scrambling ashore. Church next led the way into another small bay, so narrow that there was hardly room to manœuvre. It was intensely dark under the shadow of the cliffs, so the *Miaoulis* switched on her searchlight and swept it along the cliff foot. There were two more E-boats lying close inshore, and they too were fired upon and hit. Moving on round the next little promontory, they discovered yet another enemy vessel in hiding. Forewarned by the sounds of gunfire, she was waiting and ready, and opened fire as soon as the destroyer appeared, too accurately for comfort. The *Hursley* replied, hitting with one of her first rounds, and then sweeping the enemy's deck with her close-range weapons. Before very long the enemy's guns were out of action and she was well ablaze. The *Miaoulis* finished her off. German aircraft appeared and made several sharp bombing attacks towards the end of the engagements; but both destroyers got away without damage. Some time later, as Church said, "we heard a colossal explosion in that direction. We think and hope it was the German blowing up."

The account that follows has been compiled from various sources; but partly from information provided by Mr. C. J. Perks, who, as a signalman, was one of the British naval ratings on board the Greek destroyer *Adrias* (Commander J. Toumbas, Royal Hellenic Navy). The British Naval Liaison Officer on board was Lieutenant H. Walkinshaw, R.N.V.R., his staff consisting of Leading Telegraphist G. Haigh, Leading Signalman F. Slater, Coders Nathan and Baker, Leading Radio Mechanic J. Wood, Officers' Steward Clark, and Signalman Perks.

On October 21st, in company with the cruiser *Aurora* and the destroyers *Jervis* and *Pathfinder*, the two "Hunt" class destroyers *Hurworth* (Commander R. H. Wright, R.N.), and *Adrias* were steaming along the Turkish coast between Castellorizio and Rhodes. Shortly before dusk the two latter ships parted company, their duty being to pass into the Ægean after dark, to create a diversion with guns and searchlights off Leros, while the *Jervis* and *Pathfinder* landed stores and

equipment for the British troops occupying that island. The mission, however, could not be carried out on the night of the 21st. The two ships were located and bombed by enemy aircraft, and to have proceeded would have invited heavy air attack and probable failure.

They set forth again after dark the next evening, and by about 10 p.m. the *Hurworth* and *Adrias* were close to Leros. It was pitch dark, and Commander Wright, who was leading, signalled to the *Adrias* that he was "wasting time a bit," as he was ahead of programme. A few minutes later, as Perks writes, "there was a flash and a violent eruption, and everything seemed to fall around us. In the blackness everything was a shambles." The explosion had killed or wounded many men and had blown off the *Adrias*' bows as far as the bridge.

Commander Wright brought the *Hurworth* back to find out what had happened. "When she came up we managed to send her a signal by torch," Perks continued. "She was preparing to come alongside and take off the crew when we gave warning of a dark shape on our starboard bow, the *Hurworth* being on our port quarter. At that time we thought we had been torpedoed, not mined, and suspected the dark shape was an E-boat waiting to catch the *Hurworth*. Commander Wright increased speed and turned across our bows to engage the suspect, and must have seen that it was not an E-boat, but our bows, air-locked and still floating. He stopped engines. Then came a blinding flash, and the *Hurworth* was enveloped in flame. We all ducked behind cover for fear of splinters, and when we looked again the *Hurworth* had gone down. Her motor-boat, that had been lowered to help us, escaped and proceeded to look for her survivors while we—the *Adrias*—fended for ourselves."

As said Lieutenant Dennis Williams, of the *Hurworth*: "We were just going alongside the *Adrias* when we blew up. We, too, had hit a mine. The ship broke in two, the forepart sinking in three minutes and the after part in about eight minutes. The captain and navigating officer were blown off the ship, and I followed them. I was at the director above the bridge at



the time. I remember a sheet of flame, and I thought to myself, 'What next?' And then I was in the water. My lined waistcoat kept me afloat; but I couldn't swim because of a pain across my stomach. I got hold of a piece of wood and hung on for about half an hour."

Williams, who had five fractures of the spine and two broken ribs, was picked up by some of the *Hurworth's* men who managed to get away in a Carley float. There were fourteen in the float, including a man with a broken leg. Two petty officers took turns in keeping Williams' head above the surface. They were nearly nine hours in the water before being rescued. The lieutenant, who was very lucky to survive, was to spend many weeks encased in plaster of paris.

The *Hurworth's* navigator, Lieutenant H. M. C. Middleton, swam for several hours before being picked up, while Commander Wright, who had been blown overboard by the explosion, managed to climb back to the after part of his ship to investigate, though he was suffering from what he later described as a "mildly fractured spine" and was only able to crawl. He saw two men getting out the motor-boat, and it is probable there was no one else on board. He was given a cork lifebelt, which he put on and waited for the ship to sink, which she did after ten minutes with a great hissing of air.

He found a canister which kept him well afloat, and after about fifteen minutes was dragged into a Carley float by Leading Gunner E. Savakis, who had been blown off the *Adrias*. Being wounded, Commander Wright was a complete passenger.

It was agreed that they should avoid a German-occupied island, and Savakis set about paddling to a group of islands off the Turkish coast. "I doubt whether we made half a knot," said Commander Wright, "but Savakis paddled almost without stopping for eighteen hours until we landed on an uninhabited and completely barren island at about 5 p.m. on October 23rd. We intended to rest and endeavour to make the Turkish mainland the next day. Unfortunately, during the night the Carley float broke up. We were a long way from the

sailing *caïque* route, and the chances of attracting attention were nil. Savakis then volunteered to swim to the next island, a much larger one, from which it might be possible to obtain help. It was a long swim, the weather was not favourable, and Savakis was already weakened by his previous efforts. But at 11.20 next morning he set out, and within six hours returned with a *caïque*."

Great gallantry was also displayed by Able Seaman Charles Russell of the *Hurworth*, who was subsequently awarded the George Medal. He had been very badly burned, but helped to launch the motor-boat, and when one of the slips jammed, he kept his head, and managed to get the boat clear just before the ship sank. With four other men, he then took the boat ashore and lay up for the night. At dawn he slipped out unobserved, made his way past enemy shipping and returned to the scene of the sinking. In two trips he picked up thirty-eight survivors and landed them on an enemy-occupied island, where for three days they were hidden and cared for by Greek peasants and finally smuggled to the Turkish mainland. Russell was in charge throughout, and, in the words of the *London Gazette*, "but for his undaunted courage, determination and seamanship, it is unlikely that any of the survivors would have been rescued."

The *Adrias* had eighteen men killed, three missing and twenty-eight wounded. After the explosion, Commander Toumbas had to extricate himself from wreckage on the bridge. He found the 4-inch guns of No. 1 turret over the bridge. He said afterwards that they had no hope that anyone on *Hurworth* could have survived the terrific explosion they had witnessed. Fuel from the *Hurworth* caught fire, and he ordered the *Adrias* to go full speed astern to avoid the blazing oil on the surface. After returning to the scene with his crippled, listing ship, and finding nothing, he decided to make for the Turkish coast.

The heel of the ship was so serious that Commander Toumbas ordered the crew to muster on the port side of the quarter-deck to reduce the list as much as possible. The *Adrias*

could still steam, and though all the charts and compass had been blown away, Toumbas and his navigating officer decided they could make the Turkish mainland in the darkness and beach the ship. Shaping course by the Pole Star and the high mountains, they used the after steering position, and, nursing the ship ahead at about five knots, sighted the lights on the mainland at about 1.30 a.m. on the 23rd. During this tense journey Toumbas lost consciousness, but recovered "under the strong slappings of the quartermaster." A little later the *Adrias* was beached in Gumusluk Bay.

Immediately afterwards Commander Toumbas, who refused to be attended till the others had been examined, visited his wounded. The doctor was amputating the left arm of an engine-room rating above the elbow. The rating looked up cheerfully and said, "I don't mind very much for my hand, sir. What is a hand for our country?" Toumbas then went to the remnants of the forecastle to supervise the removal of trapped members of the crew, and after all the able men had passed before him to be congratulated, the gallant officer lost consciousness.

The saving of the *Adrias* was a fine feat of seamanship on the part of a very brave man.

The Greek dead were buried ashore, and after five weeks' hard work on the part of the *Adrias's* crew their ship was sufficiently patched and shored up to go to sea, though still minus her bows. "During our enforced stay in this village harbour," Perks writes, "we were reconnoitred daily by enemy planes and repairs had to be done stealthily. Then, with our forward 4-inch guns still thrown back over the bridge as the explosion had left them, we were ready to try our luck voyaging to Alexandria"—a distance, by the way, of more than 500 miles.

He continues: "Three M.G.Bs. made the harbour at dusk on December 1st, and at 6.15 p.m. in heavy darkness we backed out, cutting the hawsers binding us to the shore. Guided by a faint shaded stern light in one of the M.G.Bs., while the other two screened us, we turned and pushed the sea away

with our sawn-off bows, and with heavy rain falling and thick cloud above crept close inshore round the Turkish coast past Kos and Symi. The German searchlight on Kos seemed to be having a night off, luckily, and gradually we made our first 'tie-up' as dawn broke, close to Rhodes. We lay up all that day using camouflage nets, and just after dark on December 2nd slipped away again with the same escort. Keeping close inshore to avoid the enemy's direction-finder on Rhodes, we ploughed through heavier seas, and a little before first daylight on the 3rd, off Castellorizo, we saw a red light winking at us. We felt safer then, for at the other end of it was the *Jervis*, with the *Penn* in company. They escorted us to Kakavia Bay, where we lay up for the day until 4.30 p.m. when the tug *Brigand* arrived and took us in tow. The moonlit night wasn't a great help to us, and the tug found she couldn't tow us successfully, so our start wasn't too good, particularly as Jerry chose this moment to let loose a spectacular rain of bombs on Castellorizo, twenty miles astern. Happily, we weren't spotted, and as the moon went down and we neared Cyprus we breathed more easily, though by now the shoring of our bows was giving us some doubts as to its strength and lasting power. However, we duly made Limasol, and after oiling we headed for Alexandria, meeting the *Exmoor* and *Aldenham*, which took over from the *Jervis* and *Penn* as escort. At 2 p.m. on the 6th we arrived at Alexandria."

The *Adrias* went into harbour under her own steam at eight knots, with, as said an eye-witness, "her blunt bulkhead pushing the Mediterranean in front of her." All the warships present cleared lower decks and "cheered ship" as the gallant little destroyer passed slowly to her berth. Toumbas, who subsequently received the Greek equivalent of the V.C. and the British D.S.O., could not have been blamed if he had sunk what remained of his ship after the mine explosion. By sheer grit and determination, he saved the *Adrias* and brought her home, and so wrote another page in the gallant history of the Royal Hellenic Navy.

Captain Toumbas was later Captain Superintendent of the

Royal Hellenic Naval Dockyard at Salamis, and in 1945 obtained permission and caused to be erected there a monument in honour of the *Hurworth*. It is inscribed in Greek and English:

"Remember that on October 22nd, 1943, 134 British officers and men of H.M.S. *Hurworth*, commanded by Commander R. Wright, D.S.O., R.N., nobly risked and lost their ship and lives to save the company of H.H.M.S. *Adrias*, which was in peril."

### III

There were a few motor launches, with some M.T.Bs., M.G.Bs., and small minesweepers stationed continuously in the islands. Under persistent enemy bombing, they helped to augment the anti-aircraft defence, provided anti-invasion patrols and a ferry service, besides clearing channels through the minefields. When the air attacks became really bad, they were forced to lie up under the cliffs by daylight, camouflaging themselves as best they could.

This is the story of one M.L., commanded by Lieutenant B. Close, R.A.N.V.R., which had been continuously on patrol for ten nights running, hiding inshore during the daytime. At dawn on the eleventh day she was returning to harbour, when she was attacked by eight JU.88 dive bombers. She fired upon them with all she had. The M.L. suffered no direct hits, though as a result of near misses one engine and the radio were put out of action. Putting up a smoke-screen, she escaped for the time being, her crew spending the interval in replenishing the ready-use ammunition.

Fifteen minutes later there started another series of attacks, made one after another by ten aircraft. Again there were no direct hits; but near misses caused more damage and started leaks. With all his ammunition expended, Close managed to make harbour and to anchor near the shore. Aircraft attacked again, and as retaliation was impossible orders were given for

the crew to leave the ship and take shelter ashore. Some time later, Close, Lieutenant T. F. A. Winter, R.N.V.R., the first lieutenant, and the motor mechanic, Petty Officer Chandler, went on board, managed to get one engine working, and moved the ship to a safer position under the cliffs. Another air attack developed, so once more the two officers abandoned ship, Chandler remaining for a few moments to break the switches. With the explosion of the first bomb, Chandler was badly wounded in the leg. When the attack was over, Winter swam off to his rescue and managed to get him on shore.

Close, Winter and Chandler now took shelter among the rocks on the foreshore. Another air attack came, and the blast of one bomb knocked Close unconscious. Chandler could barely help himself, so with two injured men on his hands Winter went off for assistance. The air attacks, with heavy machine-gunning of the beaches, went on intermittently for one and a half hours. When a lull came and Close recovered consciousness, it was possible to help the wounded motor mechanic to a small farm nearby. Here they commandeered a donkey, and with the help of two friendly Italians managed to reach an observation post.

During the day the ship was dive-bombed and machine-gunned no fewer than fifty-seven times. Late in the afternoon Close took some men down to the beach to make another attempt to move his ship to a safer billet. They were waiting to do it at dusk when there came a further attack by aircraft, and this time the M.L. caught fire. She was soon ablaze from stem to stern and finally blew up and sank. All the crew were eventually rescued.

The experience of this M.L. was fairly typical. The work of the small naval craft in the Dodecanese was invaluable, and the gallantry and fortitude of their officers and men beyond praise.

#### IV

Resistance to the enemy in Crete had not died out when we evacuated the island in May, 1941. For the next four years the

German garrison was to have no peace. As in Greece, the underground movement was always active, and a handful of guerrilla fighters operating from the mountains constantly harassed the garrison. The guerrillas were partly Cretans, reinforced by small bands of British troops who had remained in the island by chance, preference or order. Living in caves and villages in the fastnesses of the mountains, sheltered by the inhabitants, they descended by night to raid isolated German outposts, attack transports, and to destroy, burn or blow up all they could.

To have eliminated the guerrilla bands would have required a large-scale expedition. As it was, a German force had to be maintained in the island that was ridiculously out of keeping for garrison duty. The enemy could never feel secure. In spite of four years of oppressive and, at times, sadistic, rule, in spite of savage reprisals, including the destruction of villages and the shooting of hostages, the Cretan resistance to the invader was never broken.

Immediately after the evacuation, it was realized that all three fighting services must combine in a joint effort to maintain these guerrilla fighters. There was also the immediate task of organizing the withdrawal of considerable numbers of British troops in hiding and awaiting help from outside.

The dropping of special troops, arms and stores was begun almost at once by the Royal Air Force and continued for three and a half years. But a large share of the responsibility for supplying the guerrillas and withdrawing superfluous British soldiers fell to the submarines and motor launches of the Royal Navy.

It was dangerous work. Operations had to be carried out on a steep, rocky coast which was virtually uncharted from the point of view of operations close inshore. The beaches used as rendezvous usually consisted of little more than a few yards of rocky shingle at the mouth of some precipitous ravine. Dark nights with no moon were normally chosen for the landings, and moving in through the shallows studded with rocks to within 50 yards of the shore was hazardous in the extreme. In

winter there was often a heavy sea running, while there was always the chance that the iron-bound coast might be shrouded in thick mist.

Submarines did this work in the earlier days of the resistance movement, reconnoitring by periscope in daylight, then closing the beach after dark to exchange recognition signals with a reception party ashore, after which men and supplies would be sent in in a rubber dinghy. Operations of this sort were carried out regularly and frequently within a few hundred yards of some German lookout post. That they were so often accomplished without incident speaks volumes for the daring and seamanship of the submarine captains, and the training and hardihood of the men they landed.

A new phase in these clandestine landings started in 1943, when motor launches replaced submarines in what had then come to be known as the "Crete ferry trip." The enemy had become wise to the proceedings, and the difficulties had greatly increased. There was a network of German radar stations and coastal defences to detect and engage any hostile craft approaching the shore. There were garrisons closely dotted along the coast with well-armed, mobile patrols watching the beaches in between. All likely landing places were mined, and there were regular offshore patrols of armed schooners.

On one occasion a handful of men were landed on the south coast of Crete with the object of sabotaging an enemy airfield. They duly found their way across the mountains, but on reaching their objective found it guarded by some 3,000 German troops. Nevertheless, the small party of raiders were able to burn the petrol dump and to destroy several aircraft on the ground. What is more, they managed to escape.

The German precautions were always being increased; but with little effect. Twice, at least, stores were landed unseen within a mile of an enemy lookout post. An occasional encounter would have been welcome to the young officers commanding the M.L.s. But to have opened fire would have compromised everything, and have forced the men ashore to take hurriedly to the hills, leaving their hard-earned stores



behind. Secrecy had to be maintained even under the very nose of the enemy, and it was not always easy. As one M.L. captain wrote: "The beach was far from ideal from the naval and security point of view. A certain amount of engine noise was inevitable, and it is probable we were heard at either the German post some 800 yards to the west, or the Italian post about the same distance to the east."

Bad weather and enemy activity would frequently spoil an operation; but lack of persistence was never a failing of the men in the M.Ls. Typical of their spirit was the operation which resulted in the capture and removal to Egypt of General Kreipe, the officer commanding the whole of the German troops in the island.

When news was received that the general was a prisoner in the hands of two British officers who had daringly waylaid and ambushed his car, two special M.L. operations were about to take place. They were cancelled at once, and M.L. 842 (Lieutenant B. Coleman, R.N.V.R.), with M.L. 355 (Lieutenant R. A. Logan, R.N.Z.N.V.R.), prepared to run a shuttle service to and fro between North Africa and Crete until the general and his captors could sufficiently out-distance pursuit to reach a certain evacuation point. The two M.Ls. went to four different beaches in turn; but on each occasion the closeness of the pursuit had forced the shore party to change their plans.

Day after day the hunt went on in Crete, and night after night the M.Ls. returned to their rendezvous. The pace could not be maintained indefinitely, and before long German troops were scouring every part of the island in search of their missing general and his two captors. For these latter the going was tough indeed, so much so that General Kreipe became convinced that he would die of exhaustion before release by his own men or evacuation to Egypt. He frequently begged his captors to shoot him and have done with it, but they, unwilling to be deprived of so fine a prize, goaded him ruthlessly on, up and down razor-backed mountains and stony scree, through ravines and streams, through woods and thick, thorny brushwood. How the two officers guarded their prisoner during this

precarious period, where they hid when pursuit became too close, how they lived, ate and slept, one does not know.

Finally, however, a patrol of Commando troops was embarked in one of the M.Ls. They were to land and assist the two British officers, and, if need be, to do their best to fight their way back to the beach with the prisoner. As it turned out, this was unnecessary, for when M.L. 842 reached the beach rendezvous for the fifth time the two officers and the general were waiting. General Kreipe was evacuated to Egypt without further incident, his feet greatly swollen. In all, on this particular mission, the two M.Ls. had steamed 2,500 miles almost continuously and without breakdown.

The tale of General Kreipe was one of the highlights of these Cretan expeditions, but was by no means the only adventure. Since it was the duty of the M.Ls. to avoid action, brushes with the enemy were not frequent. All the same, there was never a ferry trip that did not have its own crop of excitements. One party of twenty people evacuated included men and women of six different nationalities. On another occasion a party of Cretans who came on board from a rubber dinghy rediscovered a family feud and proceeded to settle it with knives in the traditional manner. "It was a bit tricky for the time; but the Coxswain fixed 'em," the commanding officer of the M.L. said later.

The M.Ls. were not even spared the anxieties of maternity. One woman, soon after embarking, informed the commanding officer that her time was come and "she was sorry, but thought she was going to have a baby." They made what preparations they could; but by what was afterwards described as "mental therapy" on the part of the first lieutenant, the birth was fortunately delayed until an hour or two after the ship's arrival at her base. This particular trip was described by the crew as quite the most harassing they had ever experienced.

Motor launches alone paid at least fifty of these clandestine visits to Crete. Besides landing many tons of arms, ammunition and stores for the guerrilla war, they put ashore some hundreds of specialists to help in the good work, and evacuated about a thousand people from the island.

## V

The work of the Navy in the Dodecanese did not cease when we were forced to evacuate Kos, Leros and Samos. A base for light coastal craft had been set up at Castellorizo in August, 1943, but in 1944 light coastal craft were operating from Symi, north of Rhodes. Among the little ships stationed there were seven harbour defence motor launches—H.D.M.Ls.—vessels of fourteen knots speed and 70 feet long, originally intended only for anti-submarine patrol in sheltered waters.

While destroyers carried out sweeps by night in search of enemy shipping between the islands, the H.D.M.Ls. patrolled closer inshore, intercepting enemy schooners and *caïques* carrying troops and supplies, and harassing the German communications. By day, concealed by camouflage nets, they lay up under the cliffs in remote creeks. These craft also ran a "Raiders' Ferry Service" which landed British Commando troops and men of the Greek "Sacred Regiment" in the islands to raid the German strong points and communications, and to keep the garrison in a state of unrestful alarm.

Large-scale naval operations in the Ægean began in September, 1944, when cruisers and destroyers, with a force of four escort carriers, the whole under the command of Rear-Admiral Thomas Troubridge in the cruiser *Royalist*, began to take offensive action against the enemy's shipping and island garrisons. Before that time all available ships were fully occupied in landing the Army on the south coast of France, which began on August 15th.

Affairs really started on the night of September 12th-13th, when the destroyers *Troubridge* and *Tuscan*, which had lately been employed in the south of France, fell upon a German convoy. It consisted of a coaster, two escort vessels and three smaller craft, all of which were destroyed. This success was repeated two nights later north of Crete, when the *Royalist* and *Teazer* sank two enemy merchant ships. On the 16th naval aircraft from Rear-Admiral Troubridge's carrier force—*Stalker*, *Attacker*, *Hunter* and *Emperor*—made low-flying

attacks upon enemy transport in Crete, destroying twenty-three vehicles and damaging many more. Off Melos, some eighty miles to the northward, they also sank three large and two small sailing craft, besides damaging a merchant ship with near-misses and gunfire. The same day the harbour at Melos was bombarded by the cruiser *Aurora*. She reported three hits on a merchant ship, which afterwards had to be beached, besides the sinking of three smaller vessels and damage to two more.

The island of Kithera, off the southern end of Greece, had already been occupied as an advanced naval base for minesweepers and light coastal craft, our forces receiving a vociferous and enthusiastic welcome from the Greek population on landing. The task of the sweepers was to clear the mined channels for the subsequent entry of warships and merchantmen for the relief of Greece. Before the end of September, the fleet minesweepers of the 5th Flotilla and motor launches had cleared the Kithera Channel and so opened up the first fairway into the Ægean from the west.

There were further bombardments of Melos by the *Aurora* on the 17th and 18th, the destroyer *Terpsichore* being in company on the second occasion, while on both days naval aircraft continued their successful attacks against German motor transport in Crete. That island was now being closely blockaded to prevent the escape of the enemy garrison. On the night of the 18th-19th the *Aurora* brought the war still nearer home to the Germans in Crete by bombarding the harbour at Candia and the airfield at Heraklion, while on the 19th naval aircraft attacked Rhodes and Kos, destroying enemy transport, and at Rhodes obtaining a direct hit with a bomb on a depot ship.

A notable incident occurred on September 18th, when Rear-Admiral Troubridge's carrier force was operating between Crete and Melos. Working with the *Royalist* and her carriers were the destroyers, *Troubridge*, *Teazer*, *Terpsichore*, *Termagant*, *Tuscan*, with the Polish *Garland*. H.M.S. *Brecon* and *Zetland* joined later. The *Garland* was on patrol well ahead when, at 5 p.m., she sighted a small cloud of yellowish

smoke eight miles ahead on the surface. Her lookout was remarkably good. Closing, the small object emitting the smoke was recognized as a '*Schnorkel*,' the new German invention which permitted U-boats to charge their batteries while travelling submerged. The *Garland* attacked. Other destroyers joined in the hunt, and the U-boat was held during the night and attacked by the *Troubridge* and *Terpsichore*, the last attack taking place at 4.30 a.m. on September 19th. At about half an hour later the submarine came to the surface and sank after being fired upon, most of her crew abandoning ship. She was U-407, one of the last of the German U-boats operating in the Mediterranean. Her destruction was mainly due to the *Garland* having sighted the small cloud of smoke from the '*Schnorkel*' at the exceptional distance of eight miles.

The work of the Navy continued without intermission. On the night of the 24th-25th, near Scarpanto, the *Terpsichore* and *Termagant* destroyed an enemy convoy of five vessels, which included two F-lighters, and the same night light coastal craft drove a small enemy vessel ashore at Melos. Rhodes and other islands continued to receive the attention of naval aircraft.

Shortly before eleven o'clock on the morning of September 28th, the three destroyers *Liddesdale* (Lieutenant C. J. Bateman), *Zetland* (Lieutenant C. R. Bax) and *Brecon* (Lieutenant N. R. H. Rodney), with Bateman as senior officer, entered Pegadia Bay, on the east side of Scarpanto. They very soon spotted a 100-ton *caïque* covered in camouflage netting moored close in under the cliffs immediately beneath what looked like a blockhouse. The *Liddesdale* opened fire, her first broadside of 4-inch setting the *caïque* on fire, and the third causing an explosion in "a most impressive manner." The *Zetland* came into action, and the blockhouse, which was evidently an ammunition store, exploded as well.

At this juncture the defences of the bay came to life, all three ships coming under heavy fire from two batteries in the town, and a third to the right of it close to the water's edge. They were promptly engaged by all ships at ranges of between

1,000 and 2,000 yards with their 4-inch, pompoms and short-range weapons, with the result that within five minutes all the enemy guns were silenced.

The destroyers did not escape damage or casualties. The *Liddesdale* was hit three times by shell of about 3-inch calibre, which killed three men and so seriously wounded a fourth that he died later. One shell passed through the mast; the second went through the motor-boat and whaler without exploding; and the third hit the starboard side of the wheelhouse, passed through a cabin, the charthouse and another compartment, finally exploding on the disengaged side. Three ratings in the *Zetland* were slightly wounded when her pompom received a direct hit which put the gun completely out of action, and the *Brecon*, though under fire, was not hit at all. This engagement probably accelerated the withdrawal of the German troops from Scarpanto, some of whom were evacuated to Rhodes on the night of October 4th-5th.

Our ships were ranging further and further to the northward, and on September 29th the island of Skyros, 120 miles north of Crete, received an unwelcome surprise visit from the cruiser *Black Prince* and the destroyer *Tumult*. Bombarding the harbour, they sank five F-lighters, and obtained direct hits on some other vessels and enemy installations ashore. On the night of September 30th-October 1st the *Black Prince* bombarded the aerodrome at Maleme, at the western end of Crete, and the night following the same target had a similar dose from the *Aurora*. On October 3rd naval aircraft from Rear-Admiral Troubridge's carriers were attacking the small island of Levitha, some thirty miles north-west of Kos. They also attacked shipping in one of the harbours at Leros, where one vessel was set on fire and more than a dozen smaller craft were gunned and bombed.

Six enemy assault craft were destroyed off Piscopi, to the north-west of Rhodes, by the destroyers *Calpe* and *Cleveland* on the night of October 3rd-4th, while Heraklion Aerodrome in Crete was bombarded by the anti-aircraft cruiser *Colombo*. The day following the *Royalist* fired upon a coaster beached on

the island of Melos and engaged an enemy battery, while on October 5th the *Aurora* and *Catterick* bombarded Levitha. Armed parties from both ships landed under close-support fire and straffing from fighter aircraft, and captured the eastern end of the island. After further bombardment by the 6-inch guns of the *Aurora*, the German garrison commander surrendered at dusk. Far away to the north, near the entrance to the Gulf of Salonika, on the night of October 6th-7th, the *Termagant* and *Tuscan* sank one enemy destroyer and damaged a second, besides destroying an armed trawler and a large *caïque*.

All these widespread and more or less sporadic operations fitted into the plan of campaign. It was unnecessary for the two German strongholds of Crete and Rhodes to be stormed and captured, and to have done so would have meant combined operations on a considerable scale, with unnecessary loss of life. Moreover, with many commitments in Italy, Greece and elsewhere, there were few troops to spare for extraneous adventures. It did not matter. Crete and Rhodes were already isolated, while the other islands in the *Ægean* were being cut off one by one. The German shipping was nowhere safe from attack by sea or from the air, and with their supply lines severed, surrender through starvation and lack of munitions must eventually be the lot of all the enemy garrisons. What with Italy and the invasion of the German homeland in the west, Hitler could no longer afford to send reinforcements of troops or aircraft to the remote *Ægean*. His obvious course was to pull out of Greece and the *Ægean* with as little loss as possible.

A German evacuation from the mainland of Greece we could not prevent, but with the Navy and aircraft ranging all over the *Ægean* withdrawal from the islands stood no more chance of success than the enemy's boating parties off the Cape Bon Peninsula in May, 1943.

On October 6th Rear-Admiral Troubridge, who was required for another appointment, left the *Royalist* and his force of escort-carriers. He was relieved by Commodore G. N. Oliver, under whose capable and energetic leadership the

good work of the Naval Air Arm continued. On the 7th, in the Euripo Channel between the east coast of Greece and the island of Eubœa, naval aircraft sank or damaged several small vessels and drove a minesweeper ashore, besides sinking a merchant vessel to the westward of Lemnos. The day's bag was added to by the *Black Prince* and *Terpsichore*, which sank a passenger ship, a large *caïque* and an enemy landing craft north of Skiathos.

British light coastal craft were also hard at it. On the night of October 7th–8th, in the Cyclades, they destroyed two enemy motor craft, repeating their success the following night in the same neighbourhood, when they attacked an enemy convoy. An enemy tanker was hit with the first burst of fire and left blazing from stem to stern.

On the morning of October 8th a northbound enemy convoy had been reported to the south of Psara, an island to the westward of Khios. There were three M.T.Bs. in the neighbourhood under the orders of Lieutenant L. H. Blaxell, R.N.V.R., in M.T.B. 307, who had with him M.T.B. 399 (Sub-Lieutenant D. W. Lea, R.N.V.R.), and M.T.B. 397 (Sub-Lieutenant R. G. Lubbock, R.N.V.R.). Blaxell was ordered to intercept, and at 1.46 p.m. the boats sighted the masts of the convoy, which was soon identified as consisting of a tanker, two lighters and two small craft.

It was a clear day, with a visibility of fifteen miles. The sky was cloudless and brilliantly blue with a bright sun, though a shrewd breeze with a moderate sea and swell from the south-west caused our boats to pound heavily when they steamed against it at any speed. They were gaining rapidly on the convoy, and soon after 2.30, with the sun in a favourable position and the sea on the beam, turned in to attack. About six minutes later the enemy turned towards our craft. As his only chance of success lay in a high-speed attack from different directions, Blaxell gave the necessary orders. The boats scattered, and as they did so the enemy opened up a heavy fire.

It was sharp work. By 2.48 Lubbock's boat, 397, had closed to within 900 yards of the tanker, and was being straddled by



3-inch shell. Firing her torpedoes, she disengaged under a smoke-screen. A minute later the tanker blew up with a roar and disintegrated in a burst of flame and a column of black smoke fully 1,000 feet high. Debris came raining down into the sea. The stricken ship had been carrying a large quantity of ammunition.

M.T.Bs. 307 and 399 also attacked under fire, though their first torpedoes missed. They attacked again about ten minutes later, and though under heavy and accurate fire succeeded in getting their torpedoes home. In the course of this short, well-fought engagement, one 2,000-ton tanker and a smaller craft were definitely destroyed, while a 400-ton lighter carrying stores was hit and probably foundered.

This action involved our M.T.Bs. in their first high-speed daylight attack on the Mediterranean since April, 1943. There was no question of surprise, as the flotilla had been sighted by the enemy. The weather, too, was far from good, and with the sea running it was difficult to hold the boats steady at high speed. In the words of senior officers, it was a fine effort on the part of all concerned. In particular, the determination, skill and courage with which Sub-Lieutenant R. G. Lubbock pressed home his attack under heavy fire was worthy of the highest commendation. In another report, the coxswain of Lubbock's boat was singled out for his coolness and courage during the action, while his "chief engineer," Petty Officer Motor Mechanic R. W. J. Bishop, was mentioned as having shown great initiative and devotion to duty in skilfully improvising repairs to an important defect in the engine-room while the fight was in progress.

As in the Adriatic, the Gulf of Genoa, and every other theatre of sea warfare where they were present, the young officers and men of the light coastal craft in the *Ægean* added to the already fine tradition of their branch of the Royal Navy. Their gallantry was unsurpassed anywhere. They were of very tough fibre indeed.

By this same date, October 8th, naval aircraft had begun to be very active off the east coast of Greece. They bombed a

1,000-ton merchantman in the Gulf of Petalia and left her sinking, obtained a direct hit on a Siebel ferry, and destroyed two locomotives and twenty trucks on the western shore of the Gulf of Salonika. On the 10th aircraft from the *Hunter* attacked enemy harbour installations at Syros and Leros, while on the 11th aircraft from Commodore Oliver's force were active in the Gulf of Salonika, the Gulf of Volos and the Eubœa Channel. Twice during the day they successfully bombed concentrations of enemy small craft at Khalkis, and in other areas destroyed three E-boats, a large trawler and five *caïques*, besides setting a small coaster on fire and damaging eight other vessels, including five landing craft. There were heavy losses to enemy troops in the landing craft. On the railway between Athens and Salonika naval aircraft also destroyed two locomotives and an ammunition train, besides damaging another train and cutting the railway.

An enemy battery on Ægina Island, in the Gulf of Athens, was bombarded by H.M.S. *Colombo* during the early morning of October 12th, while the next day the cruiser *Argonaut* fired upon Phleva, an offshore island about ten miles south-south-east of Athens.

A channel having been swept through the minefields, a force of about 150 warships of various types under the command of Rear-Admiral J. M. Mansfield anchored off the Piræus on the evening of October 15th. All the ships carried troops and their equipment for the liberation of Greece. The work of the Navy in this much-criticized and difficult mission may conveniently be left to another chapter.

The task of mopping up what German shipping remained, of occupying the islands, and of interrupting their communications, was to continue until October 27th, when the first phase of the operations against the enemy's island garrisons in the Ægean may be said to have ended. The naval activities during this period may be summarised in the form of a diary kept at the time:

*October 15th. Naval aircraft from Commodore Oliver's carriers attacking enemy road transport inland of Volos. Four armoured cars,*

three ammunition trucks, and twenty-seven other motor vehicles destroyed. Thirty other vehicles damaged. Other naval aircraft attack an ammunition ship, which blows up, and set a coaster on fire.

October 16th. Argonaut sinks an armed caique with 200 German infantry north-east of Psathura in Northern Sporades. Termagant sinks a Siebel ferry laden with valuable equipment. Some survivors rescued. Reported that a military force landed by Royal Navy at dawn on west coast of Lemnos. Fighting still in progress.

October 17th. Relics of German garrison of Scarpanto having been contained by Greek population, destroyers Terpsichore and Cleveland, arrive at dawn. Naval landing parties got ashore without opposition, and took over the island in the name of the United Nations, it being ex-enemy territory. Enthusiastic welcome from the people.

Lemnos. After fighting in the town, Mudros is occupied by British troops by 1 p.m. Enemy withdraw in a Siebel ferry and other craft. Several enemy craft driven ashore by our fire, one being set on fire, casualties caused in others. Some 400 enemy troops made prisoners. Off Lemnos, naval aircraft destroy six enemy craft and set a merchant vessel ablaze. Between fifteen and twenty smaller craft are also disposed of.

Near Volos, east coast of Greece, Naval Air boys do in three locomotives, and thirty-six trucks, besides damaging one loco., four armoured cars and three barges.

October 18th. Garrison of Santorin, seventy miles north of Crete, surrendered to Ajax. Argonaut sinks large enemy landing craft near Lemnos.

October 19th-20th. Night of. Termagant and Tuscan engage south-bound enemy destroyer on western side of entrance to Gulf of Salonika. Enemy driven ashore and destroyed.

October 20th. Naval aircraft bomb Kos.

October 23rd. Island of Skopelos, in Northern Sporades, occupied at dawn by troops landed from destroyer Teazer and Greek destroyer Navarinon.

Aircraft from H.M.S. Attacker operating all day against enemy landing craft laden with motor transport, as well as against road and rail traffic near Katerine, on the west side of Gulf of

*Salonika. A locomotive and ten trucks destroyed. Hits on other concentrations of enemy transport.*

*October 26th. Aurora, Tyrian and Tetcott bombard Melos. Aircraft from escort carrier Emperor co-operate.*

*October 26th-27th. Night of. Piskopi, north-west of Rhodes, occupied by troops landed from Sirius.*

# VI

Apart from the ships already mentioned, the following vessels also served from time to time under the immediate command of Rear-Admiral Troubridge and Commodore Oliver during the period September 9th to October 27th, 1944, when the operations in the Ægean were in progress: the special service vessel H.M.S. *Ulster Queen* and the destroyers *Tyrian*, *Tenacious*, *Atherstone*, *Bicester*, *Easton*, *Farndale*, *Oakley* and *Tetcott*, with the Polish destroyer *Garland* and the Greek *Themistocles*.

Long periods were spent at sea by all classes of ships, and during the forty-eight days mentioned the *Tyrian* was under way for thirty-five days, the *Royalist* for thirty-five and the *Troubridge* for thirty-one.

Losses known to have been inflicted on the enemy by surface vessels or naval aircraft from the *Attacker*, *Emperor*, *Hunter* and *Stalker* were:

*Destroyed.* Three destroyers or torpedo-boats; forty-five ships and craft; seven aircraft; 123 locomotives, railway trucks or motor vehicles.

*Damaged.* Seventy ships and craft; one aircraft; and a large though unknown number of locomotives, trucks or motor vehicles, besides damage to enemy installations by bombardment or bombing.

*Prisoners of War.* 382.

A flotilla of submarines, which included French and Greek units, had long been operating in the Ægean. From September 9th to October 27th this flotilla sank four enemy merchant vessels, two tankers and ten miscellaneous craft, including landing craft, motor launches and *caiques*.

Whereas in November, 1943, the Germans had about 110,000 tons of shipping in the Ægean, November, 1944, saw them with practically nothing.

In November, on their departure from the station, Admiral Sir John Cunningham sent a farewell message to the officers and men and the base staff of the 1st and 10th Submarine Flotillas which had been operating in the Mediterranean since the outbreak of war. Working from vulnerable and improvised bases under severe handicaps, the Commander-in-Chief said, they had greatly contributed to the successful outcome of the war in the Mediterranean by the crippling losses inflicted upon the enemy's warships and supply vessels. He expressed his great appreciation to all who had served in the flotillas since the beginning of the war for the successful and unfailing efforts which had made it so dangerous and unpleasant to the enemy.

At about this time, too, the eight destroyers of the 24th Flotilla also left the station. Captain C. L. Firth, in the *Troubridge*, had been in command since they had started to arrive in the Mediterranean in the middle of 1943, and the other ships were the *Teazer*, *Tenacious*, *Termagant*, *Terpsichore*, *Tumult*, *Tuscan* and *Tyrian*. Ships of this flotilla had taken part in the invasion of Sicily, in many bombardments in support of the Army on the east and west coasts of Italy, and in the invasion of southern France. They had operated off the Dalmatian coast and in the Ægean, and in a farewell message the Commander-in-Chief wished them goodbye and good luck, and said that their achievements in surface actions as well as in bombardments in the support of the Army had been of great value in ridding the Mediterranean of the enemy. Their good work was much appreciated.

## VII

The mountainous island of Naxos, some eighteen miles long north and south and eleven miles broad, lies in the Cyclades group about 100 miles to the northward of Crete. At the time this story begins it still had its German garrison.

At 3.25 a.m. on October 13th, 1944, H.M.M.L. 360,

commanded by Lieutenant John Ford, R.N.V.R., anchored off a beach off the west coast of the island not far from the little harbour and town of Naxia, which was clearly visible in the bright moonlight. It was flat calm, and M.L. 354 (Lieutenant Michael V. F. Poore, R.N.V.R.), secured alongside. By 4.15 the two boats had completed the landing of a number of men of the Greek "Sacred Battalion" who were to attack the German garrison at dawn. This done, the two M.Ls. closed to within half a mile of the harbour and patrolled slowly up and down, waiting for a signal from the shore to say that the attack had begun. No signal came. The attack was not made as planned, for when daylight came it was found that the Greeks had been landed on the wrong beach and too far from the town.

At 6.30 a small dinghy was seen coming out of the harbour towards the M.Ls. It contained four civilians and a German in uniform standing up in the stern. Leaving M.L. 354 to cover, Ford took his own boat towards the dinghy. The breeze was at the time blowing towards the harbour, so that the White Ensigns of the M.Ls. were difficult to distinguish.

When the little boat was close alongside the awful truth suddenly dawned upon the German, who seems to have been a warrant officer. He looked, as Ford said, "as though he were going to have an accident." The Greek rowers, however, continued to pull. The dinghy bumped alongside, and with tommy-guns and other miscellaneous weapons pointed at him the German could not draw his revolver, and had to throw up his hands. He had thought that the M.Ls. were German craft come to evacuate the garrison, and further judicious questioning elicited the fact that there were about 200 enemy troops on the island. He was clapped below as a prisoner.

Time dragged on. At 7.30 there were still no signs of any attack by the Greeks. The Germans ashore, meanwhile, realized that the M.L's. were British and that their emissary had been kidnapped. They were seen to be mounting a mortar on top of the old castle of Naxia. So the M.Ls. headed out to sea, three mortar shell being lobbed at them before they were out of range.

To conceal his intentions, Ford then took his two M.Ls. to the neighbouring island of Paros, where he made contact with another patrol of Greek troops which had been landed there. He also managed to get into radio touch with the Greeks previously landed at Naxos, to learn that they were in contact with the enemy, a few shots had been fired, and they were about to open negotiations for the surrender of the German garrison. Considering that the sight of his M.Ls. off the harbour would lend emphasis to the talks, Ford decided to return.

He was back off Naxia by 11.35 a.m., to be met by another small boat with a man waving a white flag. It was treated with the greatest circumspection until it was seen to contain the British Liaison Officer with the Greeks, two Greek soldiers and two Germans, all armed to the teeth.

The situation was complicated enough for any sea lawyer. The German warrant officer on board M.L. 360, it transpired, was the garrison commander, and the Greek landing party had allowed the two Germans to come out and talk to him in the presence of an interpreter. The Germans ashore, it seemed, refused to surrender to a Greek force for fear of reprisals from the Greek citizens of Naxia.

After some deliberation, Ford decided to enter the little harbour as a guarantee of good faith. He would cover the Germans with his guns while they marched down to the quay with the Greek troops to protect them from the populace. This being translated, the two Germans in the boat promptly asked their captured officer for orders. To this the officer replied that he was already a prisoner of war, so could give no orders. The German emissaries were then told they had until 1.40 p.m. to surrender and hoist the white flag, and were sent ashore to explain.

Just before one o'clock, leaving M.L. 354 off the entrance as cover, Ford took 360 into the harbour and anchored about 200 yards from the beach. While they were there they saw the Germans very busy, moving their mortar, machine guns and squads of riflemen to new positions. Time drew on. There

were no signs of surrender, so at 1.35 Ford weighed his anchor, ran out of the harbour, and joined 354 outside.

At 1.40 precisely both boats opened fire with their heavy machine guns at a range of 1,000 yards. The sea was calm and the shooting very good, at least three shots out of every four falling in the target area. After shooting briskly for five minutes, they ceased firing to allow their guns to cool. The enemy's machine guns had been deserted by their crews; but presently the M.Ls. were fired upon by hidden riflemen, whereupon the Germans were treated to another dose. After that there was no further reply. At about 2.20 Ford withdrew his boats to make contact with the attacking Greek troops, only to discover that the situation had developed into a stalemate. Though the Germans could not get out of their main defensive position in the old castle, the Greeks could not storm and capture it. The walls of solid masonry were too thick to be breached by mortars or the light shell of machine guns.

Reinforcements were needed, so later Ford took his ship back to Paros to embark the Greek patrol from there. He found on arrival that they had not been able to concentrate, so after arranging to pick them up next day he returned to Naxos, where both M.Ls. spent the night close inshore near Naxia, keeping a careful watch for any enemy attempt to reinforce the garrisons.

Early next morning, October 14th, the M.Ls. landed food and ammunition for the Greek troops on shore. At 10 a.m. Ford was told the Germans had opened fire with their mortar at the Greek forward positions. He was asked to silence it, so both boats went back to Naxia, where they were met by what was described as a hail of fairly accurate rifle and machine-gun fire. Unable to locate the mortar, he took his two craft out to 1,500 yards and went into action. The heavy fire sent the Germans to cover. Their shooting ceased.

How the captured German warrant officer reacted to all this business we do not know; but later that day, leaving 354 off Naxia, Ford took 360 to Paros, embarked the Greek patrol and their equipment, and landed them on Naxos. Nothing



further happened that day, and the M.Ls. spent the night at anchor as before.

At 3 a.m. next morning, the 15th, M.L. 1385 arrived and discharged more stores. Three hours later Ford had a message from the Greeks asking him to close Naxia, which he proceeded to do. Then two enemy aircraft appeared to the westward, and disappeared after being engaged. Meanwhile the M.Ls. received considerable rifle and machine-gun fire. By seven o'clock the Greeks were using their 3-inch mortar with great effect, Ford's two boats joining in with an effective bombardment which lasted fifteen minutes. The Greek attack was launched at 11 a.m., and to send the enemy to ground, the M.Ls. continued to bombard at the rate of about a round a minute. Aircraft of the Royal Air Force had been seen earlier, but at 2.45 p.m. four Beaufighters appeared and attacked the enemy with rocket projectiles, the M.Ls. closing the shore and bombarding during each run by the aircraft. Having expended their rockets, the Beaufighters attacked with cannon, keeping it up for ten minutes.

A little later the M.Ls. ceased fire to allow the Greeks to attack. Their 3-inch mortar did good work, and presently a large building occupied by the enemy started to smoke and then burst into flame. At about 4.30 p.m. came the welcome news that the enemy had surrendered, so the M.Ls. entered the harbour, embarked the prisoners and their Greek guard, and landed them elsewhere next morning.

Lieutenant John Ford had done a very good job. During these four days of complicated operations he had, in the words of a senior officer, "shown great initiative and judgment, and used his force to the fullest effect."

Naxos was liberated as the result of combined operations between sea, land and air forces. However, the lucky capture of the unfortunate German garrison commander and the accurate and well-timed supporting fire of His Majesty's Motor Launches 360 and 354 were important contributory factors to the success of one of the many little side-shows in the Ægean islands in which the smaller vessels of the Royal Navy played so important a part.

## VIII

Though it occurred some time later, another action may conveniently be mentioned here. The little island of Khalkia, steep and mountainous, lies about eight miles west of Rhodes, which was still held by the enemy. As there was a report of enemy craft in the little harbour, two motor launches were sent to investigate. They were M.L. 838, commanded by Lieutenant R. D. Poole, R.N.V.R., and M.L. 359 (Lieutenant E. G. Friend, R.N.V.R.).

They sailed from their base in bad weather, with a rough sea and a bustling north-westerly breeze, and at about 1.30 p.m. were off the little harbour of Khalkia. Leaving 359 to keep watch off the entrance, Poole took his boat inside. At about 2 p.m. the enemy started shelling the harbour with a four-gun battery from Rhodes. They were high-velocity guns, and their shooting was unpleasantly accurate. Deciding the harbour was an unhealthy spot, Poole shot out to sea at his best speed. Immediately he cleared the entrance he saw M.L. 359 steering west at high speed with shell splashing and bursting all round her. To avoid closing the range and to draw some of the fire, Poole steered to the northward at full speed, but the weather having worsened he was soon forced to reduce to eight knots.

M.L. 359 soon disappeared behind the intervening land; but at 2.35 the two boats were again in company to the northward of Khalkia. Friend's boat had been under fire for about fourteen minutes while proceeding at her best speed against the heavy sea. By great good fortune, she had suffered no direct hit. But there were at least thirty splinter holes in the ship's side and upperworks, all the wheelhouse windows had been smashed, and the engine-room telegraph controls and telephone severed. The coxswain of 359, Petty Officer H. Maud, though wounded in five places by splinters, stuck to his wheel until the ship was out of range of the guns, while the motor mechanic, S. J. Russel, kept his engines going at maximum speed for a long period in most difficult and trying conditions. In the words of a senior officer, the conduct of both these men was "in the best traditions of the Service."

## CHAPTER XIX

## GREECE AND THE DODECANESE

## I

THE island of Kithera, as already mentioned, had been occupied as an advanced naval base in mid-September, 1944. Later, minesweepers preceded the other vessels to Poros Bay, some thirty miles south of the Piræus, Poros being occupied on October 1st. British troops were landed at Patras on October 4th, and reached Corinth on the 8th, on which day a landing was also made at Nauplia.

After some delay caused by the thickly sown and extensive minefields, in which British and Greek minesweepers were lost, H.M.S. *Orion*, flying the flag of Rear-Admiral J. M. Mansfield, together with the cruisers *Ajax*, *Aurora* and *Black Prince*, anchored off the Piræus on the evening of October 15th. With the Admiral were British destroyers, the tank-landing ships H.M.S. *Bruiser* and *Thruster*, the landing ships *Dewdale* and *Ennerdale*, manned by the Merchant Navy, H.M.S. *Ulster Queen*, together with a large number of minesweepers, trawlers, landing craft and motor launches.

The Royal Canadian Navy was represented by the landing ships H.M.C.S. *Prince David* and *Prince Henry*, and the South African Navy by H.M.S.A.S. *Southern Isles*, *Seksern*, *Treern*, *Gribb*, *Bever* and *Boksburg*.

The Greek units included the cruiser *Averof*, the depot ship *Ionia*, the destroyers *Adrias*, *Ætos*, *Ierax*, *Panther*, *Spetsai*, *Crete*, and *Themistocles*, the torpedo-boat *Sphendoni*, L.S.Ts. Nos. 33 and 36, with various minesweepers and other units.

Most of these vessels carried troops and their stores, which had all been landed by the evening of the 16th. Follow-up convoys arrived, and the disembarkation of reinforcements,

mechanical transport and personnel proceeded satisfactorily. Our men had a great and spontaneous welcome from the population, by whom they were regarded as friends and liberators.

On October 17th the Greek Government arrived at the Piræus in the *Averof*, and the next day its members, accompanied by General Scobie and Admiral Mansfield, the Military and Naval Force Commanders, and Air Commodore Tuttle, made their official entry into Athens. The ceremonies included the hoisting of the Greek flag on the Acropolis, the singing of the *Te Deum* in the Cathedral, an address by the Prime Minister, and the laying of wreaths on the tomb of the Unknown Warrior. As Admiral Mansfield said: "There was no doubt of the genuineness of the reception afforded, and the scenes of delirious enthusiasm by the vast crowds will never be forgotten by the British forces taking part. They were cheered, bombarded with flowers, and frequently kissed by all and sundry. . . ."

Again, there was no doubt at all that the huge mass of the peace-loving population, who wished only for law and order after occupation by the hated Germans, regarded our troops as liberators.

In a signal from the free waters of liberated Greece, the Greek Commander-in-Chief expressed the gratitude of the Greek Navy to the Royal Navy, through whose hospitality and assistance Greece had been able to maintain an efficient and organized Navy to continue the fight against the hated aggressor who had overrun the country. For four years, he said, Greeks and British had been fighting together—side by side they had shared the perils and dangers of war; and because of their mutual love of liberty and justice, the bonds of friendship and understanding that had been forged would be eternal. Sir John Cunningham, Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, thanked the Greek Commander-in-Chief for his kind message, doubly welcome because it was sent from Greek waters. The four years that had passed seemed very long; but the friendship between the Greeks and British was an example for all time of good coming out of evil.

No ships could have visited the ports of Greece or any of the islands in the Ægean without the minesweepers. The sweepers, as has been said, opened up the channels to Poros Bay, and thence to the Piræus. Later, sweeping through the heavily mined Thermia and Doro Channels, they opened the way to Skiathos and Salonika. Very formidable minefields were found in the approaches to this latter port, where the 120th M.M.S. Flotilla and 162nd B.Y.M.S. Flotilla did particularly fine work. Meanwhile, the 160th (Greek) Flotilla of B.Y.M.S. had swept a channel into Kalamata, in the south of Greece at the head of the Gulf of Messenia, thus freeing that port for the landing of supplies, while the 2nd Trawler Group, sweeping through the Trikiri Channel, opened up the port of Volos, further north. Other minesweeping forces opened up Kavalla, on the northern shore of the Ægean, and various of the islands, while further south B.Y.M.S. of the 162nd Flotilla, with one M.L., cleared more than thirty-two mines from the Kinaros Channel, east of the island of Amorgos, to permit the entry of His Majesty's ships. A conspicuous part in many of these sweeping operations was played by the ships of the 5th Minesweeping Flotilla, of fleet sweepers, working under Commander H. L. Jenkins. His ships were the *Welfare*, *Octavia*, *Sylvia*, *Albacore* and *Stormcloud*.

On the west coast of Greece a notable sweeping operation was carried out by the 13th Minesweeping Flotilla, the 156th B.Y.M.S. Flotilla, and part of the 8th M.L. Flotilla, when they opened up the Gulf of Patras and the Gulf of Corinth and their many ports useful for the relief of southern Greece. The work was carried out under the command of Commander A. A. Martin, R.N.R., in the *Rothsay*. The minefields in the Gulf of Patras were extensive and thickly laid. There were many anti-sweeping devices and obstructions, explosive and otherwise, which played havoc with the gear. It constituted what was described as "some of the toughest sweeping ever known," but was successfully accomplished in record time. From mid-October until the end of November, Commander Martin's ships swept 353 mines.

The 13th Flotilla was to leave the station in December, and in a farewell signal wishing them and their attached dan-layers good luck, Sir John Cunningham congratulated them on their "splendid record" during two years' hard service in the Mediterranean, in which the little ships had worked unceasingly in hazardous operations while clearing and maintaining the swept channels. During the last two months in Greek waters their efficiency and determination had been of a very high order.

Commander Martin's flotilla consisted of the *Rothsay*, *Rhyl*, *Polruan*, *Bude*, *Brixham* and *Stornoway*, with the *Hailstorm*, *Nebb* and *Swona* as dan-layers. They had taken part in the occupation of North Africa in November, 1942, in the sweeping of the 600-mile Tunisian Channel in April and May, 1943, and in the operations off Pantellaria, June, 1943, Sicily, July, 1943, Salerno, September, 1943, Anzio, January, 1944, Southern France, August, 1944; besides their work in western Greece and many odd jobs. It is doubtful if any minesweeping flotilla had a worthier record of hard and devoted service than the Thirteenth in the Mediterranean.

However, to revert to Greece and the Ægean, minesweepers working there in the period September 25th to December 1st, 1944, swept about 600 miles of channels, amounting to about 700 square miles of water, to clear the channels and approaches to ports for the warships and merchant vessels carrying civil relief to Greece. They cleared 1,485 mines between the dates mentioned, and so thoroughly was the work done that not a single large warship or merchantman was lost. Incidentally, between October 15th and December 31st Allied shipping landed in the various Greek ports 95,000 tons of "civil relief," made up in food, coal, fats and articles of general utility.

## II

It is no part of our business to describe the political rivalry in Greece, which continually hampered the cause of Greek independence and caused considerable bloodshed. It was a

tragedy that British troops, who had been sent to liberate the country and to restore law and order, should have been drawn into the conflict through the necessity of dealing with a terrorist minority anxious for power. There was no alternative.

There was ample evidence which went to show the stabilizing effect of the presence of His Majesty's ships in Greek ports during the troubles, and the popularity, which was sometimes embarrassing, of their officers and men. Liberty men landed at Kalamata were given an enthusiastic reception. In the island of Naxos the townspeople expressed their loyalty to the Greek Government and confidence in the British. At the Piræus the formation of a Greek Naval Brigade from Greek naval volunteers was an unqualified success. The people were enthusiastic at seeing Greek uniformed forces, and in their first action the Naval Brigade captured and held ground and took ninety-seven E.L.A.S. prisoners. In the Cyclades Islands, where E.L.A.S. troops were disarmed, national enthusiasm ran high and the visits of British warships greatly raised morale.

After extensive sweeping operations through the thickly laid minefields, the cruiser *Argonaut* (Captain Longley-Cook), accompanied by other warships and a convoy, reached Salonika on November 9th. British troops, with their supplies and motor transport, were soon discharged.

It is impossible to mention all the ships by name; but the presence of the cruiser *Ajax*, flying the flag of Rear-Admiral Mansfield, and the destroyer *Kelvin* at Patras early in January completely saved the situation and prevented bloodshed by the rebels. The same may be said for the *Argonaut* and *Aurora* at Salonika and the *Caledon* and minesweepers at Kavalla, of which some details will be given later; the *Sirius* at Mitylene; the destroyer *Musketeer* at Volos and Skiathos; the *Meteor*, *Kimberley* and the special service vessel *Antwerp* at Kalamata; and the fleet minesweeper *Larne* at Poros. A force of minesweepers and landing craft sent to Corfu had the most beneficial effect, while the many warships visiting the Piræus undoubtedly helped in the restoration of law and order.

From many eye-witnesses one heard of the welcome given to

the British sailors by the great mass of the peace-loving population—of football matches played between the ships' and local teams, and of sailors sharing their rations and cigarettes with the people, and of giving their sweets and chocolates to the children. Except in the places where an armed rebel minority had already terrorized the masses, there was real fraternization, and our naval officers and men once more proved themselves to be excellent negotiators and ambassadors. The task was seldom easy. There had to be a great deal of restraint; but time and time again a difficult situation on shore was saved by the timely arrival of a ship flying the White Ensign.

The co-operation between the Royal Navy and the Greek Navy was excellent throughout. Schooners and *caiques* manned by Greek seamen worked with British M.L.s. and other craft for the suppression of piracy and the prevention of gun-running. It was not a matter of sinking at sight, but of patrols and cutting-out expeditions to seize rebel *caiques* without bloodshed.

### III

The cruiser *Aurora* (Captain Geoffrey Barnard), was at Salonika during part of the Greek troubles. The port had been savagely demolished by the retreating Germans, and much had to be done before it could be used by merchant ships. The Senior British Naval Officer, North Ægean, Commander D. S. Swanston, and his staff, had their headquarters ashore, and the work of salvage and repair in the much-battered harbour never ceased. H.M.S. *Barclose* (Lieutenant-Commander C. G. W. Jungo, R.N.R.), led the salvage team, and was helped by H.M.S. *Punnet* (Boom Skipper J. W. Johnson, R.N.R.), and the salvage vessel *Prince Salva*. These ships had a difficult task in clearing wrecks, and sometimes dragging sunken *caiques* along the bottom to clear the channel to the long jetty which had been used by *caiques* since the time of St. Paul. The buoyage of channels and occasional minesweeping was the job of the minesweeping trawlers. As those who were at Salonika said, it was strange that the E.L.A.S. propaganda on



shore should be hurling abuse at the British as "butchers and pirates" while these same "pirates" were quietly and methodically going about their task of clearing the wreckage so that Salonika could be used by merchant ships bringing relief to the Greek population.

Captain Barnard, as senior British naval officer afloat, took part in regular conferences with the military commanders, the British Consul and the leaders of E.A.M., the National Liberation Movement of which E.L.A.S. was the combatant force. The situation was delicate in the extreme. An idle word or misjudged action might have led to a wholesale outbreak of violence; but all the time football teams of British sailors played matches against the local Greeks with spectators of all parties looking on and cheering. On one occasion when the *Aurora's* Royal Marine band was present and ended the proceedings with "God Save the King" and the Greek National Anthem, even the armed E.L.A.S. onlookers stood strictly to attention and were punctilious in saluting British officers. It was a peculiar situation. There were frequent anti-British demonstrations outside Commander Swanston's headquarters. He had eight Greek girl assistants for clerical and other work in his office. In spite of the threats of E.L.A.S. patrols and sympathisers to cut off their hair and commit other outrages, the girls remained loyal throughout.

Repairs, stores and supplies for all the various little ships working at Salonika had to be provided by the *Aurora*, which acted as a depot and repair ship as well as a guardship. Parties evacuated from Mudros and Kavalla had also to be supplied, and though cigarettes and other canteen stores were in very short supply and strictly rationed, nobody went empty away. There was no doubt at all that the *Aurora's* presence at this critical time had such a warning effect upon the extreme elements among the rebels that peace was preserved and bloodshed avoided.

By early in December the fleet minesweeper *Welfare* (Commander H. L. Jenkins), the *Octavia* (Lieutenant-Commander L. C. D. Godwin) and M.M.S. 103 (Lieutenant E. H.

Freeman, R.N.V.R.), which had been minesweeping, appeared off the little Greek port of Kavalla, a hotbed of political strife near the borders of Macedonia and Thrace. The Greek destroyer *Ierax*, with the Greek Naval Officer-in-Charge designate, was also off the port, while the British Naval Liaison Officer, Lieutenant-Commander W. de B. Thomas, R.N.R., was at his headquarters ashore.

As the place was seething with rebel intrigue, the anti-aircraft cruiser *Caledon* (Captain J. R. S. Brown), was sent to keep order. Prepared for any emergency, she reached Kavalla on December 9th. The Royal Marines and platoons of seamen were ready for landing, but were disappointed when the minesweepers on the spot reported all quiet. Kavalla was an E.L.A.S. stronghold, and the atmosphere was tense when Captain Brown landed to meet the commander of the British troops to draw up plans in case of trouble. He went ashore again on the 12th for a conference with the leaders of the Greek rebel political party in the Town Hall, very soon coming to the conclusion that he was dealing with a clever lot of rogues "who would stick at nothing provided it promised sufficiently large dividends."

"The conversation," said Captain Brown, "was conducted through an interpreter who, when I commended him on his pronunciation, stood to attention and told me he was an ex-sergeant of the British Army. I did not ask how he had found his present employment!"

The Greek deputation, led by a man who called himself Commissioner for Thrace, lodged protests because two *caiques* carrying arms had been seized by a British trawler and a Greek destroyer. They referred to the Greek Naval Officer-in-Charge on board the *Ierax* as "the outlaw." The day was hot. All the windows in the conference room were tightly shut. Tempers rose as the story was unfolded. The atmosphere became sultry. All the Greeks started to speak at once and shout each other down. To prevent an impasse, Captain Brown brought the meeting to a close by rising and thanking them all. He returned to the *Caledon*, leaving the "Commissioner for Thrace"

and his friends in no doubt that the arrival of the Royal Navy and units of the British Army meant the maintenance of law and order.

The *Caledon's* presence and the sight of British seamen rather quietened the situation for the time being, though it was a period of uneasy peace, and all leave had to be stopped for the sailors. The problem of keeping the men occupied for over a month was difficult. So was the matter of fresh provisions, which could only be obtained by friendly foraging parties sent to coastal villages in the ship's boats conducted by the first lieutenant.

The presence of the Greek destroyer *Ierax* was regarded with the deepest suspicion by the local E.A.M. leaders, and the Greek Naval Officer-in-Charge was prevented from taking over his duties. E.L.A.N., the naval branch of E.A.M., refused even to supply the *Ierax* with water or to allow her men ashore. As the situation was impossible the ship was sent back to the Piræus on December 13th.

After the arrival at Kavalla of E.L.A.S. reinforcements, coupled with rumours of a planned demonstration against the British, stores landed for the port party were embarked on the 15th by a naval party with a guard of Royal Marines. The local people did not show much interest in the operation, though as work started at 7 a.m. it was probably too early in the day for anyone to take much interest in anything. Even the anti-British demonstration was poorly attended, and there were no incidents. In spite of the heated propaganda of the local newspapers, the *Caledon's* presence and the sight of her White Ensign had a steadying effect.

On the 18th British Army personnel was evacuated from the beach, and later that day two transports arrived and were berthed alongside a quay. Both ships were laden with troops and their stores, and the *Caledon* and the two transports sailed for Salonika on the 19th.

The *Caledon* was back at Kavalla by the 22nd, to find things still quiet. Captain Brown sent polite letters to the Prefect and the local head of E.L.A.N. inviting them on board for a

conference; but a reply came asking they might be excused as they were "very busy in the office." Another invitation was completely ignored.

Christmas came and went, and on December 29th M.M.S. 103 went into the inner harbour and broadcast to the townsfolk four times in Greek through the loud-speaker without opposition from groups of E.L.A.N.

"People of Greece: Citizens of Kavalla. We want you to know what is our purpose here. We come as friends to ensure the peaceful and safe use of the sea by all men engaged in normal trade. Our ship has been removed from the battle against our common enemies to show that Eastern Macedonia and Thrace are not forgotten; to help and ensure that safe passage of vessels engaged on lawful business, and to prevent certain acts which are contrary to international sea law. All ships carrying food and other supplies for the population will be helped on their way and enabled to proceed in safety and without hindrance to their destinations. The unlawful carrying of arms by sea is not permitted, and it is our intention to prevent it by exercising the right of searching all vessels. We have attempted to discuss these matters with the Nomarch of Kavalla and the Chief of E.L.A.N.; but we have been unable to see them. We therefore ask for the co-operation of all authorities and all Greek citizens in carrying out our task of preserving law and order at sea."

The result of this broadcast was that the Prefect and the Head of E.L.A.N. visited the *Caledon* the same day, the latter maintaining it was necessary for his *caiques* to remain armed to protect themselves against the Germans and black market traders. He was told that the Royal Navy would look after that. The meeting, as Captain Brown reported, ended on quite a friendly note, though the discussion continued throughout the walk from his day cabin, across the quarter-deck, and down to the bottom platform of the accommodation ladder.

In its counterblast to the broadcast, which it referred to as "that silly and anonymous proclamation," the local newspaper excelled all its previous efforts in invective. Among other

choice epithets, the *Caledon* and the Royal Navy were called "pirates, thieves and man-eaters."

It was a trying time; but the *Caledon* and her tenders continued to examine all the gun-running *caiques* entering or leaving Kavalla. On one occasion, when it had been necessary to open fire to compel a *caique* to obey orders, E.L.A.S. protested against what they called a "hostile act." However, there was no further reluctance to stop.

The final absurdity came when an E.L.A.N. *caique* ran ashore on the beach and the Greeks could not refloat her. They asked the British for assistance, so a salvage party from the *Caledon* got the *caique* off and towed her back to harbour. This brought a letter of thanks from E.L.A.N., which referred to the salvage as "evidence that it was possible for friendly relations to be re-established between the British and Greek peoples."

It was a trying and exasperating period for the captains of His Majesty's ships, who had to exercise the patience of Job and the wisdom of Solomon. A single false step or hasty utterance might have caused battle and bloodshed. But in their uncongenial and most difficult duties over a period of months, the officers and men of the Royal Navy upheld the tradition of their Service with dignity, tact and human understanding.

#### IV

Two more little sidelights on the liberation of Greece are of interest.

His Majesty's L.C.C.S. 253 was a landing craft, infantry (large) fitted out and completely converted for use as a small hospital ship for use in forward areas. She had thirty beds and total accommodation for fifty patients by making use of camp-beds and stretchers. She had a complete operating unit, with a sterilizing room, hospital stores and X-ray plant. Full surgical equipment was carried, as well as Red Cross stores, medical comforts and gear for survivors. The staff carried comprised a team of two doctors, a sick berth petty officer and

five assistants, together with a cook and supply assistant. The Medical Officer-in-Charge, Surgeon Lieutenant-Commander Rowan Nicks, R.N.V.R., was a New Zealander, and a surgeon of "most marked drive and ability." He and his team had worked together for eighteen months, at first with a field surgical unit attached to an Army field ambulance during the invasion of Sicily, and then in L.C.C.S. 253 off the coast of Dalmatia.

In mid-December, 1944, the ship was sent to the Piræus to work with the Army. "When we first arrived," the M.O.-in-Charge wrote, "no one knew exactly what we were. Then it gradually filtered out what was our real function, and the Army seized on to us to act alongside a jetty as a true casualty clearing station."

Life became hectic indeed. At one time fighting was going on barely a quarter of a mile away, with snipers' bullets whipping the decks. The hospitals ashore were cut off, and the hospital ships lay in the outer anchorage, which meant an open boat passage of half a mile in icy conditions. Accordingly, all the most seriously wounded were sent straight to L.C.C.S. 253, frequently under fire. The Navy worked in the closest co-operation with the Army, who willingly helped with stores and extra staff. The work, which was extremely heavy, consisted of resuscitation, blood and plasma transfusion and surgical treatment for the wounded. Over one period of three days they operated in the theatre for fifty-three hours, on one occasion for twenty-five hours on end on absolute emergencies. The patients came from the Navy, Army, Air Force and civil population, including women and children. As a Senior Naval Officer wrote, L.C.C.S. 253 was "a most useful innovation. She must have been blessed by many."

Another errand of mercy carried out during this period was that of the United States L.S.T. 32, commanded by Lieutenant Gardnar Paul Mulloy, U.S.N.R.

At 6.30 a.m. on December 14th, 1944, while on passage from Salonika to Taranto, this ship picked up a radio message to the effect that the Greek-manned ship *Ionia* was ashore on

rocks near Skiathos island, in the northern Sporades, east of the Gulf of Volos, and needed immediate assistance. L.S.T. 32 had passed through the Skiathos Channel three hours before, but, feeling he might be able to help, Mulloy altered course and pushed back at his best speed.

Reaching the spot at about 9 a.m., they found the *Ionian* hard and fast on the rocks near a small island. Her position was exposed. It was blowing hard, with a heavy sea, and the *Ionian's* stern was already under water, with her bow portion rapidly breaking up. The British destroyer *Musketeer* was standing by, and informed L.S.T. 32 that in the existing weather conditions nothing could be done to rescue life with her own small boats. The *Musketeer* had communicated with the *Ionian* earlier, to learn that some of the shipwrecked crew had managed to swim ashore. But others remained in the wreck, and their situation was precarious. In the opinion of the Greek captain, his ship would very soon sink.

L.S.T. 32 carried a number of small landing craft at her davits, larger and more weatherly boats than any carried by a destroyer. So, making what lee he could, Mulloy approached the wreck and lowered two of his craft. In the heavy sea that was running, it was a hazardous operation, but successful. In Mulloy's own terse phraseology these craft, "with a great deal of difficulty due to heavy seas, went alongside the port side of the *Ionian* and in three trips rescued approximately ninety persons, including one woman and the captain."

No one was now left on board the wreck; but there remained the people who had managed to make the shore. "The entire island shore was rocky except for a small 200-foot landslip on the southern side," Mulloy reported. "Since the surf was too heavy for small boat landing we beached the ship on the landslip to pick up approximately 100 passengers and crew who had managed to reach the island. After beaching, a shore party was sent to round up survivors and assist those who were injured."

A total of 194 survivors of the *Ionian*, of whom 134 were officers, petty officers or ratings of the Royal Navy, were finally

taken on board U.S. L.S.T. 32. According to the Greek captain, there were three fatal casualties when the ship struck, while others were drowned while swimming ashore. A number of injured were treated on board the L.S.T. for broken bones, cuts and exposure, while, as most of the survivors had lost all they possessed, they were made comfortable with blankets, clothing and shoes generously provided by their American hosts. The next afternoon they were safely landed at the Piræus.

Lieutenant Mulloy wrote in glowing terms of his ship's company: "I have nothing but the highest praise . . . for their excellent and efficient work in spite of the handicap of adverse weather conditions of high winds, heavy seas, cold driving rain and poor visibility. Their actions were spontaneous and courageous to a man, despite the personal dangers involved, and their willingness and speed of action saved many lives. The officers and men under my command cannot be commended too highly for an excellent job of seamanship and bravery displayed during the rescue of survivors of the shipwrecked *Ionia*."

## v

The work of the Navy in harassing the enemy garrison in Rhodes continued until after the New Year, 1945.

On November 5th the *Kimberley* sank an enemy F-lighter and her escorting launch near the island of Piscopi, and seven days later bombarded an enemy battery at Alimnia, west of Rhodes. On the 14th light coastal craft engaged two enemy lighters off the same island, sinking one of them.

After dark on December 5th, in heavy rain, the *Aurora*, with the destroyers *Musketeer*, *Marne* and *Meteor*, opened up a heavy bombardment of enemy shipping in the main port of Rhodes, with the idea of destroying the small craft with which the Germans were in the habit of making foraging expeditions to the neighbouring islands in search of food and supplies. Six evenings later the destroyer *Liddesdale* intercepted an enemy force of three landing craft trying to land men at Symi, north



of Rhodes. One landing craft was blown up and sank, and the other pair dispersed. The *Liddesdale* came under fire from enemy batteries in Rhodes, but had no casualties or damage. On the night of December 15th-16th, too, the *Marne* intercepted an enemy assault craft and a *caïque* near Symi, and made prisoners of their crews.

Fuller details of the varied work of some of the destroyers were available in reports from Commander R. L. Fisher, in H.M.S. *Musketeer*, who was in command of a force consisting also of the *Marne* (Lieutenant-Commander P. A. R. Withers), *Meteor* (Lieutenant-Commander R. D. Pankhurst), *Kelvin* (Lieutenant-Commander R. M. U. MacFarlan) and *Tuscan* (Lieutenant-Commander E. N. Wood, R.N.V.R.).

The main object of their mission was to prevent enemy traffic between the Dodecanese islands, and within two days of their arrival, while patrolling at night to the north-west of Rhodes, the *Kelvin* and *Tuscan* came upon two enemy landing craft, and opened fire in the light given by a star-shell. "The landing craft was firing light weapons in all directions," wrote the *Kelvin's* commanding officer. "Some was going just over my bridge. This craft was soon hit and well on fire, stopped and emitting many small explosions." The second enemy craft, located a few minutes later, was close inshore. The high rocks of the island of Khalkia looked dangerously near, but she too was hit and set on fire, finally running ashore on some rocks in a small cove, where she blew up with a large explosion. Some survivors from the first craft were picked up from two small boats, and it appeared that their vessel was running supplies to the garrison in one of the nearby islands. The *Tuscan* left the area a few days later on relief by the *Meteor*.

The *Musketeer* visited various of the islands, and closely examined others still held by the enemy. With the *Tuscan*, she approached Khalkia within 300 yards, to discover a landing craft so cleverly camouflaged and merged into the rocks that it would have been invisible at any greater distance. It was destroyed. The next day, with the *Marne*, she expended thirty rounds in bombarding an enemy position, and in the course of

visits to friendly islands hoisted Greek colours and fired her guns in salute. Church bells responded.

The night before one bombardment of an enemy-held island by the *Marne* and *Meteor*, an observation party was landed from a schooner. It consisted of Captain Harden, an Army officer, who knew the islands like the palm of his hand, the gunnery officer of the flotilla, with Sub-Lieutenant M. L. Thornevill and a telegraphist from the *Marne*, an Army telegraphist and two Greeks. Variouslly equipped and armed, this team of seven got ashore before midnight, and after a very rough climb over rock and through scrub and thick thorn bushes found themselves by 2.15 a.m. on top of a hill, overlooking the bay and town. Star shell fired a few minutes later from seaward gave them a good but fleeting view of their surroundings. There, among the rocks on the summit of the hill they spent what remained of the night, moving off just before dawn to a spot hidden from some suspected German positions.

It was daylight by 6.30, with the *Marne* and *Meteor* in sight to seaward. Half an hour later, as Thornevill afterwards wrote: "General search of the country with binoculars. Nothing in sight. Only thing which worried us were stone goat-pens which could have, but didn't, hold Germans."

Continuing to search the area for likely targets, they settled tentatively on some suspicious-looking buildings, though it was impossible to say definitely what they were. They saw a laden lorry on the road moving away from the town and some people on foot, which may have been troops. It was decided that a closer view was necessary, so at 10.10 a.m. Harden and Thornevill set off across country to another peak little more than a mile from the target area. It took them an hour to get there, and judging from the large-scale map it must have been a difficult scramble. Moreover, since they were moving in broad daylight and might conceivably have met an enemy patrol, it was not without risk.

However, they reached the hilltop without incident and chose three targets—a shack, possibly a workshop, with troops moving about it and some guns in front of two houses; some

new trenches and an encampment in the making, with another gun and some caves used as shelters, and some barracks and buildings on the waterfront with men busy around them. The sensation of prying upon a completely unconscious enemy must have been peculiar.

Having selected their targets, Harden and Thornewill made their way back to the original hill, and by 2.15 p.m. had established radio communication with the bombarding destroyers. The *Marne* fired first, and one of her shells either hit or near-missed a house in rear of the town. The Germans could be seen removing things from the house in a great hurry, so the observation party, determined to be in on the game, gave the enemy two magazines from a carbine as they took cover. The *Meteor* fired next, plastering all the targets with a good concentration of shell. Then the *Marne* bombarded again, and eventually, followed by the *Meteor*, closed in to 3,000 yards at high speed with their 4.7's and pompoms drenching the target area. The sight from the hilltop was impressive.

"From the smoke and dust that arose it appeared that considerable damage was done to the buildings," Thornewill reported. "An ammunition dump some twenty yards north of the barracks was burning and exploding continuously. It had not stopped when we left at 5.15. Direct fire from the ships at close range landed well in the target area. Pompom shell hit a house in rear of the town, and another fire was started. This was a fairly steady blaze, probably petrol."

The observation party made their way to the beach without incident, and by 9.45 p.m. were safely back on board the *Marne*. Reporting on this incident, Commander Fisher wrote: "I wish to bring to particular notice the enterprise shown by the commanding officer of the *Marne* in arranging the first landing of officers from this flotilla in a small enemy-occupied island, and the courage of those who landed. Although one has since learnt that it is safe to go anywhere under the guidance of Captain Harden, it seemed at the time a considerable adventure to us who are new to this theatre." One can agree.

The garrison of this same island suffered further attention

from the *Kelvin* and *Meteor* three days later, with M.T.Bs. 402 and 403 and H.D.M.L. 1373 co-operating. Captain Harden and an observation party had again been landed, the target being a spot where a company of German troops were living in tents and buildings. The *Kelvin* opened the ball at 10 a.m., and rapidly found the target, putting down two lots of rapid fire. Then, when the venturesome Captain Harden approached the enemy with a white flag to demand their surrender, he was fired upon. The *Kelvin* retaliated with a further nineteen salvoes, plastering the target area. The German commanding officer's house was hit, and enemy casualties were seen.

The observation party was re-embarked, and at 2 p.m. the M.T.Bs. moved inshore to carry out a close reconnaissance. They went right round the bay without a shot being fired or any sign of life. Then, as they turned to go out, a rifle was fired from the shore, followed by the stuttering reports of half a dozen machine guns and a Bofors. The *Meteor* and *Kelvin* gave covering fire and moved ahead. H.D.M.L. rushed in, firing her little gun. Enemy fire ceased for the moment, but the H.D.M.L. and the two M.T.Bs. remained stopped in a huddle, for what good reason we do not know. Anyhow, the sight of so good a target was too much for the enemy. They reopened a heavy fire. Our light craft were well straddled and narrowly escaped being hit, so further covering fire was provided by the two destroyers. Captain Harden, who knew the German defence system and which houses were occupied by their troops, directed the *Meteor's* fire with devastating effect.

Two mornings later the *Musketeer* was making a thorough search of the coast of this same island, with M.T.B. 402 acting as ferret. At 10.30 two Greek fishermen were seen waving from the rocks. They were embarked by the M.T.B. and taken to the destroyer, and brought news that after the bombardment by the *Meteor* and *Kelvin* the German garrison had moved to a cave in the middle of the island. Except from one spot in the corner of a bay, it could not be seen from the sea. The *Musketeer* was moved very cautiously into the desired

position and, as Commander Fisher reported, "when our bows were almost on the beach the cave could just be seen, through a cleft in the hills, from the director and foremost turrets. Thirty rounds were expended at 6,000 yards, which fell all round the cave entrance."

Two days later it was reported to the *Marne* by some friendly Greeks that thirteen Germans had been killed by the *Musketeer's* shoot, and that they had moved to yet another position. This the *Marne* duly bombarded.

And so the work continued, with the destroyers and light coastal craft making it more and more difficult for the small and diminishing garrisons of the few islands still held by the enemy to eke out a precarious existence, until the time came when the survivors decided that the game was no longer worth the candle and they were better off as prisoners of war.

Another such operation took place in February, 1945, when news was received that a party of about forty Germans had landed on the island of Niseio, south of Kos, in search of food and supplies. Their craft, a 90-foot motor launch, was found and sunk by the destroyer *Exmoor*. Supported by the *Exmoor* and *Ledbury*, a small party of Greek and British troops were landed, and in the skirmish that followed the German raiding party lost eight men killed. Thirty more became prisoners of war.

## VI

Mention has already been made of the good work in the Aegean of aircraft of the Naval Air Arm flown from a force of escort carriers working under the orders of Rear-Admiral Thomas Troubridge and Commodore G. N. Oliver. Further details of the work of one of these carriers, H.M.S. *Emperor* (Captain T. J. N. Hilken), are of interest.

In one period of eleven consecutive days her aircraft took part in 260 operational sorties, dropping over 200 bombs and firing 155,000 rounds of ammunition in straffing attacks upon enemy batteries and positions in one of the islands. The figures quoted represented no mean effort on the part of the pilots, the

maintenance and armament staffs, and the flight deck personnel. On the eleventh day the pilots were still complaining if they were not given what they considered their fair share of flying, and until the fifth day the maintenance parties worked long hours and maintained serviceability at 100 per cent. Thereafter, as damage received through enemy flak added to the work of routine maintenance, they fought a losing battle. The ordnance parties had often to race against time to get aircraft rearmed in time for the next sortie, but their enthusiasm and efficiency showed no signs of flagging on the eleventh day. It was the same with the deck landing party, whose work was difficult during emergency landings or when sending off two large strikes in quick succession.

Of the thirty aircraft hit by enemy flak only one failed to make a safe landing, a tribute, not only to the pilots, but to the extraordinary toughness of the Hellcats of the Fleet Air Arm. Large holes in the ailerons or main planes seemed to make no difference whatsoever to handling. In two cases of damage to airframes, one aircraft had half the tail-plane and elevator completely shot away, and the other had serious damage to the elevator and tail-plane which completely locked the elevator control. In both cases the aircraft made absolutely normal landings. In two other cases aircraft were hit in the engine by 20 mm. or possibly larger shell, and both landed on without any oil in the engine at all. One caught fire on landing, but the flames were soon extinguished.

In more than 200 strafing sorties not one pilot was seriously injured. One aircraft, shot down in flames, was piloted by Sub-Lieutenant W. Vine. R.N.V.R. The news was received on board at 5.30 p.m., and that the pilot had baled out into the sea. An air-sea rescue Walrus, piloted by Lieutenant J. Issaverdens, R.N.V.R., took off from the *Emperor* at 5.35, and a quarter of an hour later landed beside Vine's dinghy in full view of an enemy battery less than five miles away. Vine was rescued without difficulty and the Walrus landed on again at 6.5 p.m.

Apart from their strafing attacks, the *Emperor's* aircraft gave

valuable service in spotting the gunfire of cruisers and destroyers. During the straffing attacks there were incidents in plenty. One of the most interesting missions was a fighter-bomber attack led by a lieutenant of the Royal Netherlands Navy upon some caves near an enemy-occupied town. The 'planes came right down to ground level, and three bombs landed near the entrances to the caves, blowing down the stone walls which protected them. Aircraft then fired their machine-guns into the caves themselves, which were evidently used for storing ammunition. Volumes of smoke emerged from two of the openings, and presently there was a violent explosion. When the smoke and dust cleared away the roof of the cave had collapsed.

The Squadron Commander, Lieutenant-Commander (A.) M. F. Fell, R.N., led many successful missions, including one in which they attacked a number of *caiques* moored in a harbour, three being set on fire and two others crippled.

Compared with the huge air forces operating from land bases, the Naval Air Arm was a relatively small service. But its war record was unsurpassed. Naval pilots had taken part in the Battle of Britain, and had suffered, and inflicted, heavy casualties. They had flown and died in their old aircraft on those suicidal attacks on the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* during their progress up-Channel from Brest. At Taranto, in the North Atlantic, with the convoys to Malta and North Russia, in the Mediterranean and every other theatre of maritime war, the young men of the Naval Air Arm, flying in most cases from the flight decks of aircraft-carriers, had shown again and again they had nothing to learn in the art of fighting in the air.

As for their gallantry, it would be presumptuous for me to extol that. The Royal Navy, of which the Naval Air Arm is an essential component, is jealous of its own tradition. If it is also proud of its Air Arm and its record, that is enough.

## CHAPTER XX

## THE NORTHERN DALMATIANS

## I

BY November, 1944, most of the Germans that remained had been forced to evacuate the southern Dalmatian Islands and the southern ports of Yugoslavia, and had withdrawn to the islands of Pag, Rab, Krk, Cherso and Lussin and the mainland opposite. It was not until April, 1945, that the enemy was finally expelled from the whole of this area and the islands, and the naval operations in the Dalmatians, which had started in October, 1943, with a handful of light coastal and landing craft based upon Vis, came to an end.

Throughout this period it was a story of close co-operation between the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force, the Yugoslav military forces under Marshal Tito, and the small detachments of British troops and Royal Marines used as raiding parties for harassing the enemy garrisons scattered among the islands and in the coastal towns on the mainland. The enemy was ever on the defensive. He was never, anywhere, safe from attack by sea, land or air. His convoys by sea were always liable to destruction.

So far as the Royal Navy was concerned, no great battleships were engaged, no aircraft-carriers or cruisers, except for the last few months, when the *Delhi* was stationed at Split and the *Colombo* at Zadar. None the less, the story of those eighteen months affords a striking example of the successful use of sea power working in close collaboration with other arms, and a testimony to the courage, endurance and good seamanship of the officers and men of a few destroyers and numerous other anonymous little ships who also helped to make history.



## II

On the evening of November 1st, 1944, acting upon information received, the destroyers *Wheatland* (Lieutenant H. A. Corbett) and *Avon Vale* (Lieutenant Ivan Hall) were patrolling near Pag Island, in the northern Dalmatians. The Germans were still in the process of evacuating the ports and islands further south. Enemy small craft were expected to be making their way up the coast from Zadar or Sibenik, and it was probable that enemy destroyers or corvettes from Fiume would be sent south to escort them.

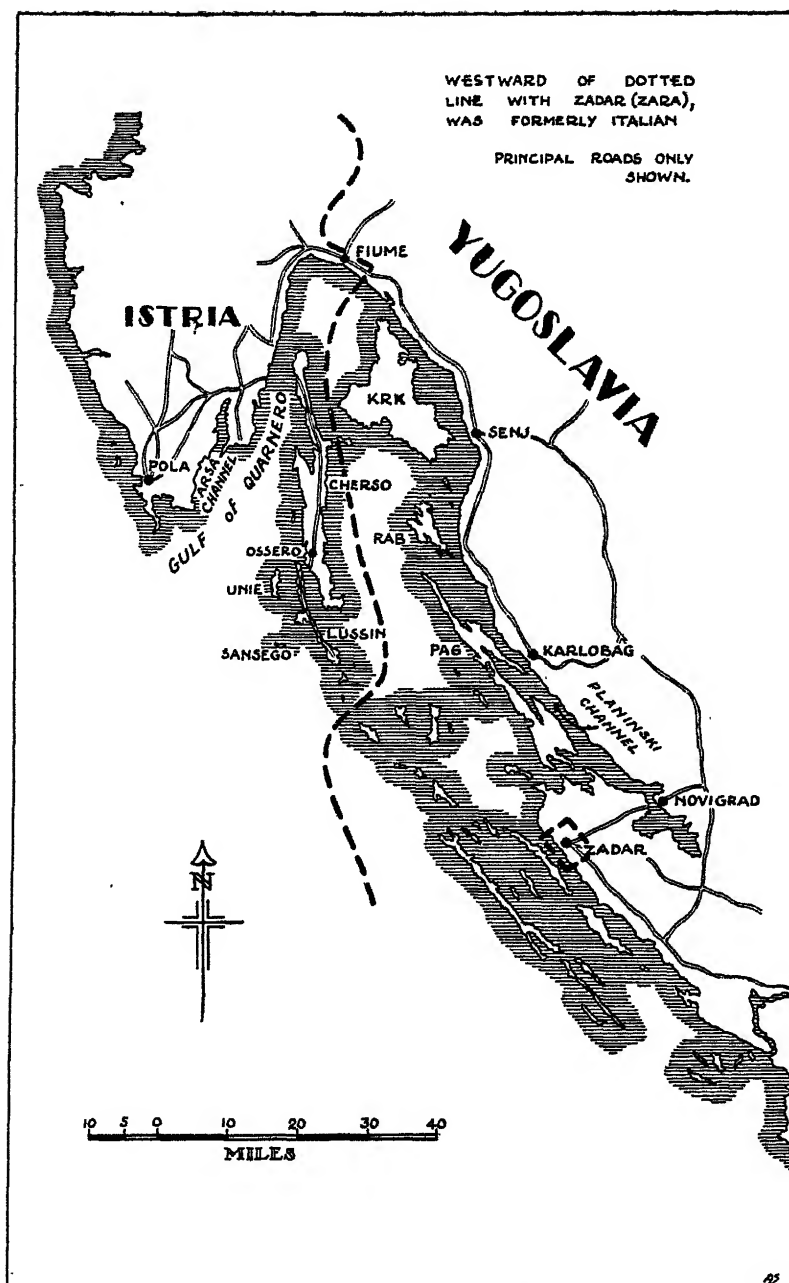
It was pitch dark by 7.55 p.m. when the radar of our destroyers indicated that enemy craft were in the vicinity. They moved out to intercept, and at 8.12 sighted the enemy. Fire was opened with main armaments and star-shell two minutes later, the range being about 4,000 yards and closing fast.

The enemy replied, the *Avon Vale* being narrowly missed by a 4-inch shell which sent its splinters on board. Our ships, however, each taking one target, were very soon hitting. The enemy's fire became erratic, and within nine minutes the *Wheatland* and *Avon Vale* were circling their targets with their pompoms and short-range weapons in action. Their fire was devastating.

By about 8.50 the first enemy ship rolled over and sank, and the second was blazing. The *Avon Vale* closed her victim to pick up survivors, who were all German. The *Wheatland*, meanwhile, fired a few more rounds at the burning ship and approached to pick up survivors. At 9.43 the blazing wreck blew up and sank about a mile from where the first vessel had vanished.

At 9.55 our destroyers became aware of yet another enemy ship in the neighbourhood, which was immediately followed by a star-shell bursting in the water 5 feet from the *Avon Vale*'s side. Two more shell fell unpleasantly close. Our ships at once turned towards the new enemy and increased to full speed, fire being opened at 10.3. Hits were very soon being made, and the pompoms again came into action as the range closed.

The enemy, which was the ex-Italian destroyer *Audace*



THE NORTHERN DALMATIANS.

manned by Germans, tried to escape under a smoke-screen. Though no flames could be seen, she must have been hit early in the action. Her speed dropped, and at 10.28 the *Wheatland* closed in to complete the kill. Further action was unnecessary. The *Audace* had ceased firing, and at 10.30 she sank, leaving a large patch of oil on the surface, with a number of survivors. Our ships steamed to the spot to pick them up, which was not an easy task in the freshening wind and rising sea.

Beyond a certain amount of superficial damage to the *Avonvale*, neither of our ships had any casualties. It was a smart bit of work, and, in the words of a senior officer, the captains of the *Wheatland* and *Avon Vale* "fought their ships with great skill, courage and determination. The decisive results obtained were a tribute to the high standard of training and efficiency which had been reached in these ships. The enemy were quickly disorganized by the accurate gunnery of our destroyers."

In a matter of two and a quarter hours from the first round being fired, the enemy had lost one destroyer and two corvettes that they could ill afford.

On November 17th the destroyers *Lauderdale* and *Eggesford* bombarded enemy positions on Rab Island with good results, and on December 3rd a more ambitious attack was made upon the ex-Italian island of Lussin, in the Gulf of Quarnero, south of Fiume, which served as a German naval base and was well protected.

Connected to the neighbouring island of Cherso by a bridge at Ossero, Lussin has a good landlocked harbour two and a half miles long with deep water throughout, at the southern end of which, near the little town of Lussinpiccolo, the German garrison was concentrated. The island and harbour were protected by the Asino battery on a hilltop. It had an all round arc of fire and contained three or four long range 6-inch guns, which more than once made accurate shooting at our light coastal craft operating in the neighbourhood. There were numerous well-concealed smaller guns and nests of heavy machine-guns.

It was in the main harbour, and in a small cove on the west coast of Lussin called Port Cigale, that the Germans maintained a number of explosive motor-boats, one-man torpedoes, and other craft. They were a threat to our destroyers and light coastal craft working among the islands, and could operate so far afield as Ancona and Rimini, on the east coast of Italy. It was therefore decided that Lussin should be attacked on December 3rd, 1944, by units of the Royal Navy working in conjunction with the Royal Air Force.

The Naval Commander for the operation was Lieutenant-Commander Morgan Giles, an able and daring officer whose experience of the Adriatic was unrivalled. For more than a year he had been Senior Officer, Dalmatian Islands, with headquarters at Vis, where he was in operational control of the light coastal craft working off the Yugoslavian coast, besides being the naval organizing authority for many commando raids and clandestine landings from landing craft and motor launches. His "flagship" for the Lussin operation was L.C.H. 282.

It was arranged that the destroyers *Lamerton* (Lieutenant-Commander G. T. S. Gray) and *Wilton* (Lieutenant G. G. Martin), together with L.C.Gs. 4, 14 and 8, should arrive at Port Colorat on the east coast of Cherso at dawn. With the assistance of a forward bombardment officer, Captain Davidson, R.A., who was to be landed with his bodyguard of Royal Marines and partisans on the southern end of Cherso, these five ships were to bombard the Asino battery and other targets by indirect fire over the land. Enemy targets on Lussin, particularly the Asino battery and a power-house near by, were also to receive the attention of medium bombers, Beaufighters and Hurricanes of the R.A.F.

Lieutenant-Commander Giles in L.C.H. 282, with L.C.F. 16, M.L. 468, H.D.M.Ls. 1162 and 1163, and M.B.Gs. 642 and 674, was to be in position at dawn about ten miles south-east of Port Colorat, partly to simulate a landing, partly to draw hostile fire from the bombarding ships.

On the western or seaward side of Lussin, two M.Ls. 218

and 841 were stationed to the northward of Unie Island to intercept any enemy craft trying to break out in the direction of Pola. By first light the destroyers *Brocklesby* (Lieutenant-Commander K. R. S. Leadlay) and *Quantock* (Lieutenant K. T. Holland), with M.T.Bs. 633 and 649, were to be concealed behind Sansego Island, to the west of Lussin. They were to emerge when ordered to deal with the enemy craft at Port Cigale and the enemy installations ashore.

The morning broke fine and clear with good visibility, though there was cloud at about 3,000 feet. The naval bombardment from Colorat started at 7.35 and continued until 1 p.m., the two destroyers and landing craft firing in all some 3,000 rounds of 4-inch. Due to a mischance, Captain Davidson was unable to spot, but in spite of it the bombarding ships were well on to their targets within seven minutes of opening fire. Lying close inshore under Cherso, both destroyers were fired upon by machine guns from a village nearby. They discouraged this with occasional rounds of 4-inch and bursts of pompom fire.

The aircraft attack started at about 8.30 with thirty-six rocket Beaufighters coming in from different directions and using their cannon also. Their attack, as Giles said, was "a most inspiring sight." They plastered their target very cleverly from low altitude, and effectually silenced the Asino battery. The medium bombers did not attack because of the low cloud, but Hurricanes swept in to destroy or badly damage the powerhouse. The Beaufighters, remaining in the area so long as their fuel permitted, gave valuable help to the bombarding ships by spotting their fall of shot.

At about noon Giles left his L.C.H. in an M.T.B. and went to the *Lamerton* at Port Colorat. The commanding officer of that destroyer was told to take the three L.C.Gs. out, and that his retirement would be covered by a direct shoot by the *Wilton*. Simultaneously, the *Brocklesby* and *Quantock*, with M.T.Bs. 633 and 649 to make smoke if necessary, emerged from behind Sansego. The *Brocklesby* was ordered to bombard Asino, and the *Quantock* to deal with Port Cigale and the enemy craft

there. They were not to close if Asino's 6-inch guns were still in action.

But the battery had been silenced, and by about 2 p.m. both destroyers had approached to within about 500 yards of the entrance to Port Cigale, and were pouring shell into the cove and enemy-occupied buildings and positions at point-blank range. They each fired about 300 rounds. The effect of this concentration was devastating, four small craft being sunk in the cove and enemy installations on shore being blown into ruins. One shell from the *Brocklesby*, a tracer, went in through the front door of a conspicuous house with telephone wires, and blew off the roof.

The *Brocklesby's* captain, Leadlay, could not see all the inner creeks of Port Cigale, which was little more than a small pocket in the land with a very narrow entrance. M.T.B. 633 (Lieutenant K. Golding, R.N.V.R.), with the flotilla officer, Lieutenant-Commander Cornelius Burke, R.C.N.V.R., was accordingly sent in to "sink, burn or destroy." She did so to some effect, destroying four explosive motor-boats, one of which was under way. The single driver of this craft was either naked or attired in a flesh-coloured rubber suit. When he saw the M.T.B. he drove his boat on the rocks at full speed, leapt ashore and jumped from rock to rock peppered by the M.T.Bs. machine-gunners.

Meanwhile, Germans hidden in the woods on three sides of the cove opened up a heavy fire on 633 with rifles and machine-guns. Seeing the tracer, the *Brocklesby* and *Quantock* plastered the enemy positions with their 4-inch and short-range weapons. M.T.B. 633 was hit repeatedly, and had one man killed and two wounded. Two of her engines were also put out of action; but she managed to withdraw under the other. So restricted was the little cove that she had to use her propellers to turn.

The *Wilton*, meanwhile, had been ordered to make a direct bombardment from the east. By about 2 p.m. she was within 1,000 yards of the east coast of Lussin, "hammering hell," as someone expressed it, out of all the enemy positions. The guns in the Asino battery, she reported, were badly knocked about

and deserted by their crews. She obtained a direct hit on a medium-sized coast defence gun and "knocked it for six," and when a machine gun in a tower had the impudence to put some holes in her funnel, she knocked that out also.

Though the attack upon Lussin was no more than a side-show, those concerned in it had all the risks and excitement of a major operation. Ably organized and boldly executed, it was an example, not only of successful team-work between the Navy and Royal Air Force, but also of good co-operation and understanding between the destroyers, various types of landing craft and light coastal craft split up into three different forces.

It is not known whether the Asino battery was permanently knocked out; but the attack of December 3rd, by wrecking the enemy's shore installations, destroying his explosive motor-boats and other craft, and helping to shatter his morale, curbed the activities of the local German Navy for some time to come.

### III

H.M.S. *Delhi*, the anti-aircraft cruiser, commanded by Captain G. R. Waymouth, was sent to Split in November to represent the Royal Navy, and to establish relations with Marshal Tito's partisans. At the time of her arrival the Germans had recently left, while there were still enemy light naval craft at Zadar, some ninety miles to the north, with other craft at Lussin and Fiume.

Captain Waymouth's task was not enviable. The partisan forces, flushed with triumph, had recently occupied Split. The *Delhi* was regarded as an interloper, rather as though the British intended to seize and occupy the port in perpetuity. This was far from being the case. The ship was merely sent there to work in conjunction with the Yugoslavs, and to cater for the needs of the British light coastal and other craft working in the area in direct assistance of the partisans. All sorts of difficulties and obstructions were put in Captain Waymouth's way. He had to exercise the greatest restraint and patience for the four months that the ship remained.

Her only chance of action came when she was attacked during darkness by four explosive motor-boats from Zadar or Lussin—one does not know which. The first headed straight for the cruiser, hit a landing craft alongside bounced off and exploded. The second was destroyed by the *Delhi's* guns; while the third, blinded by a searchlight, hit a jetty near the harbour entrance and exploded. The fourth boat fled and was sunk by a Yugoslav battery.

Fraternization on the higher levels was not easy, though this did not prevent the *Delhi's* officers and men from doing all they could to encourage friendly relations. Their first care was a score of orphaned children who had made their homes in a passenger steamer half-sunk by Allied bombing. Everything from food and chocolate to clothing and hot baths were showered upon the ship's "family." On Christmas Eve over 800 Yugoslav children were the *Delhi's* guests for a party, food and gifts being provided out of canteen funds and surplus stores. It was a roaring success, and when an electrical failure ashore threatened to dim the proceedings, the ship sent a generator to keep the lights going.

It was difficult to keep the sailors occupied and happy. Leave ashore was limited, and liberty men had to be careful not to offend local susceptibilities. There were no untoward incidents, and when the *Delhi* finally sailed for home a good deal of the anti-British prejudice had been overcome, and there were many Yugoslavs who were genuinely sorry. It must have been a source of satisfaction to Captain Waymouth and his officers and men when, on passing Gibraltar homeward bound, they received a signal from Admiral Sir John Cunningham: "It is with a fine record of valuable service that the *Delhi* leaves the Mediterranean, not only as an ack-ack cruiser, but also as the representative of the Royal Navy at Split."

The small naval force in the area operated under the immediate command of Captain N. V. Dickinson, whose name has already appeared in this narrative, but eventually became Senior Naval Officer, Northern Adriatic. The craft working among the islands were based upon Zadar (formerly the



Italian *Zara*), where the anti-aircraft cruiser *Colombo* was stationed for duties similar to those of the *Delhi* at Split, and consisted from time to time of the L.S.T. H.M.S. *Thruster* (Lieutenant-Commander A. W. McMullan R.N.R.), L.C.Ts., L.C.Is. and L.C.Gs., M.T.Bs., M.G.Bs. and M.Ls. They were employed in landing troops and artillery for the larger operations; covering the landings by gunfire, landing small reconnaissance and raiding parties to harass and hunt down the enemy, as well as to carry out regular night patrols to intercept what little enemy shipping remained.

On one occasion two M.T.Bs. brought off nine American airmen from the enemy-held island of Krk. On another, three M.T.Bs. and an M.G.B. landed a raiding party on Cherso to mop up an enemy air-spotting post. The raiders were picked up later with eight prisoners and captured radio equipment.

M.G.Bs. carried out surprise bombardments of enemy coastal batteries, while M.Ls. swept mines and landed more raiding parties. Some idea of their varied work can be gathered from the following extracts from a war diary:

"*Friday*, M.Ls. 283 and 240 landed a party on the west coast of Lussin to cross the island and raid Neresine. Soon afterwards they landed four men at northern end of Lussin to move down and hold the western end of Ossero Bridge. [This connected Lussin with Cherso.] They then landed the main raiding party on Cherso three miles north of Ossero. Attack on Ossero failed, as the terrain was very difficult, and the party arrived too late. The Neresine party took six prisoners and were picked up by M.Ls. on the return journey.

"*Saturday*. M.Ls. 449 and 351 searched for the four men who were landed on Friday to hold Ossero Bridge, and eventually found them on Unie [an island to the west of Lussin]. M.T.Bs. 698, 706 and 670 patrolled off Arsa, and took off an R.A.F. pilot who had made his way to the coast. [Arsa, on the east coast of the Istrian peninsula, was the main supply port for the enemy island garrisons.]

"*Sunday*. M.T.Bs. 695 and 705 patrolled off Arsa and landed a party at Portobado. . . . M.Ls. 238 and 577 repeated

the Ossero raid of Friday. Party landed undetected and entered the town. Enemy were in strong positions and prevented the blowing up of the bridge. Ten Germans were killed before raiders withdrew with a loss of one killed. After taking off the party, M.Ls. bombarded the strong point, but one enemy gun continued to fire.

"*Monday.* M.T.Bs. 670 and 643 carried out Arsa patrol and sank a 70-foot harbour launch containing thirteen harbour police from Lussin. Two survivors picked up. The launch was armed with an Oerlikon gun and was on her way to Pola. . . . Kristofor [Rab] again bombed.

"*Tuesday.* Kristofor and Stojan Point [Rab] were heavily bombed. There were reports that guns were knocked out with over 100 casualties. Considerable panic. Two of the guns' crews have deserted."

This exciting work went on without intermission, and the telling of the complete story would fill a book.

On one dark night a flotilla of M.G.Bs. commanded by Lieutenant-Commander T. G. Fuller, R.C.N.V.R., came upon a convoy of seven enemy craft. The M.T.Bs. shot ahead and shouted at their largest opponent through the loud-hailer in Italian, "Don't shoot or we'll sink you all." When at a distance of about 30 yards, however, the enemy opened fire. Our boats replied at once, and within twelve minutes one of the enemy craft blew up with a shattering explosion. Another lighter was damaged and boarded, but sank later, while a motor launch and two *caiques* were captured and brought back as prizes.

Another time Fuller's flotilla sank a tug and a small tanker at night, and made a prize of the lighter which accompanied them. Fuller rather regretted that. As he wrote: "When about 300 yards from the enemy an unfortunate mistake was made. The tug was towing the tanker alongside, with the lighter in tow astern. The silhouette made the combined tug and tanker appear as an old-type destroyer. The lighter appeared as a perfect German F-lighter, which would probably be mounting a 12-pounder. Due to this unfortunate mistake, we closed and opened fire, damaging the enemy ships. Had we known the

composition of this force I am sure that all the convoy could have been captured intact without damage and the necessity of gunfire."

Fuller was certainly a lucky man, besides a doughty fighter. Capturing a 30-ton schooner, he found she contained a compressor, land-mines, cigarettes, cigars and eight bags of mails for some unfortunate German garrison. Some measure of his success he attributed to the blood-curdling threats shouted by the partisan who manned the loud-hailer. The evening two M.G.Bs. captured a 400-ton schooner the enemy crew was obviously shaken to the marrow by the harsh voice ordering them to heave to or to be torpedoed, with a few choice remarks as to what would be done to them personally, with knives, if they disobeyed. That schooner carried a large quantity of food.

One night three of our light coastal craft were carrying out the patrol off the Arsa Channel. They were commanded by Lieutenant W. E. A. Blount, R.N.V.R., in M.T.B. 634, with M.T.B. 710 (Lieutenant A. W. Bone, R.N.V.R.) and M.G.B. 660 (Lieutenant A. T. Robinson, R.N.V.R.).

It was a very dark night with no moon as the boats reached their patrol position. The visibility was no more than 600 yards to seaward, but the water was unusually phosphorescent. Just before eight o'clock Blount took his three boats to within 50 yards of the enemy coast, and lay there, hidden in shadow, bows to seaward, waiting for what might happen. Their vigil did not last long, for half an hour later they became aware of three vessels of some size approaching from the southward. Our craft moved out to intercept, and the enemy were presently made out as, to use Blount's own words, "three large vessels of 300 tons or more, very high out of the water, with tower-like forepeaks and poops looking more like tin camouflaged Noah's arks than anything else." They were heavily armed.

Blount went in to attack, opening fire with all guns on the enemy leader at a range of about 400 yards. His consorts followed, each boat engaging her opposite number in the enemy's line.

M.T.B. 634's pompom was soon hitting close to the water

line of the enemy leader, while her other weapons seemed to knock out the German's forward and midship guns. Internal fires could soon be seen fore and aft, though, as Blount said, "her after guns started hitting us, though doing little damage."

Bone's boat, M.T.B. 710, did deadly shooting on the second enemy with her two 6-pounders, while her Oerlikons and 0.5-inch machine guns were also hitting. Seeing Blount under heavy fire, Bone switched two of his guns on to the enemy leader.

Robinson, meanwhile, in M.G.B. 660, was shooting at the third German ship, damaging her severely. He received no return fire, so shifted to the second target, which had become very active. This ship retaliated, the M.G.B. being hit by 20-mm. and machine-gun bullets.

The enemy leader suddenly turned to port, directly towards Blount's boat. "At this point," as he said, "all my guns stopped temporarily except one bridge Vickers 0.303-inch. I decided it was imperative for the unit to keep inshore of the enemy, where we were nearly invisible to them against the background of land. I altered course slowly to port, informing the unit of my intentions, and telling them to close up. The leading enemy ship went on turning, and appeared to me likely to divide the unit. This he nearly did. . . ."

It was an exciting moment, with our craft twisting and turning and the enemy leader coming nearer and nearer. He passed close astern of M.G.B. 660 and M.T.B. 710, narrowly missing them. The firing had ceased temporarily by Blount's orders; but, asking permission to re-engage, both the boats mentioned were soon hard at it. "The enemy must have regretted his action," Blount said. "He received the full broadsides of both boats at point-blank range and sank by the stern almost immediately."

Our craft then closed up and opened fire on the two Germans which were making off to the northward. It was at this time that M.T.B. 710 (Bone), received a direct hit from an 88-mm. shell which killed two men and wounded two others, besides putting the main engines and both generators out of action, plunging the ship into darkness.

Leaving 710 behind, Blount took 634 and 660 after the retreating enemy, which presently stopped at the entrance to the Arsa Channel. It was difficult to see them against the land, but Blount fired a torpedo, which ran straight. "It hit the target, which exploded and disappeared in a column of black smoke, and was not seen again."

The third enemy ship was to seaward, stopped and heeling over on what looked like a low spit of land, so, after rejoining 710, which could still move at slow speed, Blount again went in to attack. The "land" on which the enemy appeared to be "beached" proved to be oil fuel on the surface of the sea. She was, in fact, sinking by the stern in twenty-five fathoms, only her bow and small portions of her showing above water. A few more rounds were put into her at point-blank range to hasten her end.

All our boats reached their base in safety at 710's best speed. All had been hit, though only 710 had casualties. It was a good night's work—a bold, well-executed series of attacks resulting in the loss to the Germans of three armed vessels of considerable size and great utility.

Patrols were continued off the Arsa Channel, where, after another action, five F-lighters, a tug and two E-boats had taken refuge. The Royal Air Force was turned on to this collection, and sank two craft during their first attack, and subsequently sank another pair and damaged two others.

#### IV

A further spirited engagement was the outcome of a daring entry by M.L. 238, Lieutenant-Commander W. Gibson, R.N.R., into the harbour of the enemy-occupied island of Krk, in the northern Dalmatians south of Fiume.

Three M.Ls. were implicated: Gibson's boat, M.L. 468, (Lieutenant F. A. Scott, R.N.V.R.) and M.L. 460 (Lieutenant K. D. Dewar, R.N.V.R.). Gibson was senior officer, and his force had been ordered to hunt out and to attack two enemy craft reported to be patrolling off Krk. They arrived on their

patrol ground soon after 9 p.m. There was a full moon, with a south-easterly breeze and slight swell, with occasional heavy rain squalls blotting down the visibility to almost nothing.

The patrol was carried out within 100 to 200 yards of the shore, Gibson purposely keeping close in, as the moonlight was very bright between squalls and he wanted to keep under the shadow of the land. However, they sighted no enemy craft, and at about 11.30 p.m. moved off towards Krk town with the intention of "having a look in the harbour, with the possibility of sinking something inside."

At ten minutes past midnight, Gibson detached M.Ls. 468 and 460 half a mile from the harbour entrance with orders to cover him with their gunfire "if things got too warm and I was unable to get out." He took his own ship into the little port, which has an entrance about 200 yards wide and is partly protected by a breakwater, the end of which he passed within 50 yards. About 300 yards away he soon saw what he took to be five craft tucked into a corner of the harbour deep under the shadow of the land. They looked like schooners and lighters; but, wishing to make certain, he switched on his small search-light. The moment he did so he was fired upon by a battery of six 20-mm. guns.

As he wrote: "I opened fire with Bofors at the surface craft ahead. . . . They [the 20-mm. guns] were replied to by our midship and after Oerlikons. Numerous light machine guns were observed firing from both the mole to port and a low quay to starboard. . . . These were silenced in about one minute by very effective fire from both port and starboard twin Vickers. Hits were observed in the direction of the surface craft, and a dull red glow was seen, followed by a small explosion."

Then the Bofors shifted its fire to the shore battery on the starboard bow. The noise of the gunfire was terrific. "We were receiving some hits from these guns, and the white tracer from their guns, and the red tracer, together with shell-bursts of Oerlikon and Bofors, were illuminating the town and ship at so close a range"—roughly 100 yards.

At about 0.20 a.m. Gibson put his engine to slow astern,

with the idea of backing out of harbour. But the stern of his ship fell off to starboard, which left her across the harbour entrance. It was then found that both engines were out of action, petrol pipes having been cut by a 20-mm. shell bursting in the engine-room. However, except for one gun, all the shore batteries had ceased firing, and a few rounds from the Bofors silenced this one. "I ordered cease fire, although still in the harbour entrance, about 50 yards from the south mole. My intention was to make another investigation and see if the boat could be got clear without calling in the others to assist."

They succeeded in this. The fuel tanks were changed over, and although the engines had an airlock in the fuel system, the boat was got under way by constant hand pumping and joined her consorts outside. M.L. 238 was hit at least eleven times by 20-mm. shell, and many more times by splinters and bullets. As may be imagined, she was fairly badly knocked about, but by some miracle had no casualties at all.

In his report of the engagement, Gibson mentioned Acting Chief Motor Mechanic Cecil Lonsdale and Stoker John Nugent, whose action in the engine-room undoubtedly saved the ship from destruction. This was endorsed by a senior officer, who added that the shooting of M.L. 238's guns seemed to have been very accurate against the shore positions, "which is very much to the credit of the discipline and morale of the crew under close and heavy fire."

# v

The port of Zadar, as has been said, served as a base for the British light coastal and other craft working in the area. It was within easy reach of enemy vessels stationed at Lussin, which meant that a constant night patrol was maintained to seaward. One night in January, 1945, H.D.M.L. 1290, commanded by Sub-Lieutenant D. M. H. Russell, R.N.V.R., was one of the little ships on patrol.

The weather was clear with good visibility, with a light breeze and little sea, when those on board 1290 heard two loud

reports and saw a flash on an island about five miles to seaward. This was followed by the sounds and flashes of gunfire and streams of tracer, which was clearly an engagement between some of the outlying British patrols and the enemy.

The ship's company of 1290 redoubled their vigilance. They were rewarded, for at 2.20 a.m. they sighted a small object in the water on the port bow at a distance of about half a mile. Looking through his glasses, Russell soon identified it as a small motor-boat approaching at slow speed. Increasing speed to close, he altered course to bring his guns to bear.

Things happened rapidly. Two minutes after the first sighting, at a range of about 30 yards, Russell illuminated the oncoming craft with his small searchlight. The boat, which had two occupants, immediately swung round and made off at high speed. She probably had the legs of the H.D.M.L., but the gun's crew of 1290 were ready, and their shooting was good. As Russell himself described it: "Fire was opened by my after Oerlikon, and direct hits were scored by all the twelve rounds fired. The boat caught fire, heeled over and sank in less than thirty seconds."

Her two men could be seen in the water, but as Russell had noticed what looked like depth-charges in the stern of the motor-boat he expected an explosion, and did not immediately approach to pick them up. His caution was fully justified, for about a minute later there was a heavy underwater explosion which flung up a column of water about 10 feet high.

Having been joined by two other H.D.M.Ls. on patrol, Russell started to close the Germans in the water. While doing so he saw the whitened track of a torpedo approaching from starboard. He put his helm over and the torpedo missed ahead, being heard to explode later on hitting an island. It had evidently been fired by a consort of the boat Russell had sunk, for they heard the sound of high-speed engines receding to the northward. The H.D.M.Ls. were not fast enough to chase, so at 2.45 a.m. the two Germans, both wounded, were picked up and later taken into harbour as prisoners of war.

H.D.M.Ls. did not often have the chance of action with the



enemy, and 1290's exploit was a tribute to the vigilance of her officers and men, and the success of her gunnery, which sank the enemy with great efficiency and economy of ammunition.

## VI

Captain Dickinson, as has been mentioned, had his headquarters at Zadar. On one occasion he was asked by the Yugoslav military authorities if he could transport 1,800 of their troops from Zadar to Novigrad, at the bottom of the lower Planinski Channel to the southward of Pag Island, the very next night. It involved the collection and organization of the necessary landing and other craft at very short notice, and the complicated passage of a convoy by night through a series of narrow and intricate channels where navigational safeguards were practically non-existent and where there were many outlying rocks and snags. By superhuman efforts, the job was done, and the expedition, consisting of four landing craft escorted by a couple of M.Ls., duly sailed at 11.30 p.m., and safely disembarked their troops in the required spot at dawn next morning.

The Yugoslavs were grateful. As one of the results, Captain Dickinson received the following letter signed by the two Yugoslav officers responsible for the military side of the expedition:

"DEAR SIR,—On behalf of the 4th Army and ourselves, we wish to thank you for the successful landing of our troops on Novigrad Beaches. The sacrifices that the Royal Navy exhibited in carrying out their landing is of the utmost importance towards the operations of our 4th Army in the near future. The transport of the convoy was carried out in the best order and in due time, although the weather conditions were very unfavourable, making almost impossible the manœuvres in the narrow passages of the sea channels. These deeds can be accomplished only by the very skilful and resolute seamanship and is deserving the greatest

appreciation. 'The name you gave this operation, 'Dobra,' means in our language 'Good,' and we request you to permit us to add one word in order to classify it as 'Very Good.' Our fighting men feel very enthusiastic about having this opportunity to deliver, in co-operation with the Allies, the last decisive blow to the enemy. Some of our men were heard to remark that we shall soon contact an Allied 8th Army operating in Northern Italy.

"Death to Fascism. Freedom to the people.

"Yours sincerely,

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"*Politkou*, Major.

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"*Kommandant*, Major."

To complete the story: during the night of April 3rd-4th, 1945, L.C.T. 380 landed Yugoslav troops on Pag Island, while during the ensuing days L.C.Gs. 19 and 20 provided gunfire support and carried out satisfactory bombardments of the enemy defences. Pag town was in the hands of the Yugoslavs by the evening of April 5th.

Mines having been sighted in the Planinski Channel to the southward of Pag Harbour, M.Ls. were detailed to sweep them. L.C.Ts. 421 and 412 had also taken two lifts of troops and stores from Novigrad to the south of Karlobag, on the mainland, where supporting fire for their operations was provided by L.C.G. 4. Karlobag and Prizna, further to the north, were both in Yugoslav hands by the evening of April 5th.

By April 9th, still advancing, the Yugoslavs had occupied Jablanac, on the mainland opposite the southern end of Rab Island, and were close to Senj, about twenty miles to the northward. On the night of the 10th-11th M.G.Bs. operating west of Senj engaged three German F-lighters and two E-boats going south, and inflicted damage.

Supported again by the Royal Navy, Yugoslav troops landed on Rab Island early on April 12th, and by 3 p.m. all the enemy's positions were occupied and resistance ceased. The Germans were still making desperate efforts to withdraw their island garrisons, for on the night of the 12th-13th M.T.Bs.

670 and 697, with M.G.Bs. 643 and 658, operating in the northern Planinski Channel between Krk and the mainland, met three groups of enemy craft proceeding south, and went in to attack. The convoys were broken up, and a large ex-Italian torpedo-boat manned by Germans was torpedoed. She sank in one minute.

By April 22nd the islands of Krk, Lussin and Cherso had all been liberated with the usual naval co-operation. When the Commander of Lussin Harbour and Island, a Lieutenant Fischer, surrendered, all the thirty explosive motor-boats once stationed there had been destroyed "in one way or another." None of these amphibious operations could have been carried out without the active and willing co-operation of the Royal Navy.

The whole of the Dalmatian coast and the islands were now free of the hated Germans. It was to sea power, in the shape of a few score of little ships and some hundreds of officers and men of the Royal Navy, who had been operating and fighting there for eighteen months, that the Yugoslav nation owed a very large measure of its military successes on land which resulted in the final liberation of the country.

## CHAPTER XXI

## UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

## I

DURING the last three months of 1944 units of the Allied Navies continued to give their gunfire support on the right flank of the Army near the Franco-Italian frontier, while there were frequent night clashes between the patrols of Allied light coastal craft and the enemy coastwise convoys between Savona, Genoa and Spezia.

The highlight of this period was an engagement fought in the small hours of December 17th off Mesco Point, northwest of Spezia. The heavily armed German convoys moved very close inshore under cover of the coastal batteries, so after dark on December 16th two separate forces of light coastal craft were ordered to patrol in likely positions to intercept. A short distance to seaward, as a covering force, were five trawlers under Lieutenant-Commander W. B. T. Bate, R.N.V.R., in the *Minuet*. His other ships were the *Hornpipe* (Lieutenant-Commander H. D. L. Legh, R.N.R.), *Twostep* (Lieutenant J. Nye, R.N.V.R.), *Ailsa Craig* (Lieutenant T. E. Hornsby, R.N.R.) and *Gulland* (Lieutenant G. A. Anderson, R.N.V.R.). It was the first time this procedure had been tried.

It was a very dark night with no moon and little sea or swell when a north-bound enemy convoy of eight ships from Spezia was duly located by the light coastal craft. At about 2 a.m. the trawlers, less than a mile and a half from the coast, turned in to attack. Star-shell were fired by the trawlers, and the battle started. The enemy convoy opened up a hot fire and the shore batteries chimed in. The trawlers were shooting as hard as they could, with the range closing to 800 yards. Almost at once an enemy R-boat was hit and destroyed, though in the welter of

shell splashes, the clouds of smoke, the gun flashes, glare of star-shell and the sparkling lines of tracer it was very difficult to see.

The action lasted no more than ten minutes, and ended less than a mile from the coast with the enemy's retirement behind a smoke-screen. The trawlers came under hot and accurate fire, and were lucky to get away with superficial damage to the *Twostep*, whose captain, Lieutenant Nye, had his arm broken by a splinter. On board the *Ailsa Craig* was the Roman Catholic Chaplain, Father W. E. Meyjes, who had gone out "to watch the show," and to take photographs. What photographic results the reverend gentleman obtained we do not know; but as the captain of the *Ailsa Craig* said of the period when the enemy's fire was hottest: "The only man on my bridge who wasn't ducking in time with the rest of us was the Padre. Every time we bobbed down, he bobbed up, to take a photo."

In that action two enemy F-lighters and the R-boat were definitely destroyed.

During the winter bad weather sometimes interfered with the operations of the light coastal craft, though on every possible occasion they were at sea. M.T.B. 378 was commanded by Sub-Lieutenant G. P. H. James, R.N.V.R., who was still at school on the outbreak of war. One dark night, with poor visibility and a slight sea from the south-east, he was on patrol in the Gulf of Genoa with an American P.T. boat and a British M.G.B. Enemy ships were located at about 10.30 p.m., and about twelve minutes later the P.T. fired torpedoes. Whether or not any of them hit is not known, but, following a heavy explosion, the coastal batteries opened fire with the usual star-shell.

At 10.45, James, who had parted company with the other boats, sighted five F-lighters close inshore and very difficult to see against the dark background of land. They opened fire with their 88-mm. guns, but, holding on, James went in to 700 yards and fired torpedoes. Half a minute later the third ship in the enemy line was hit and went up in a column of smoke and spray. The other enemy craft and the shore batteries opened

up a heavy and fairly accurate fire as M.T.B. 378 disengaged seaward, to escape without damage or casualties. It was while she was travelling at full speed that a clip on the rubber hose connection of the salt-water inlets happened to burst. Leading Motor Mechanic A. D. Ripley was equal to the emergency. For more than five minutes he held on the hose connection by hand against the very high pressure of salt water. His presence of mind probably saved the ship. "Without this action," said James, "the boat would have had to disengage at slow speed and would undoubtedly have been hit." Incidentally, James himself was highly commended for pressing home his attack in the face of heavy calibre gunfire, and showing great determination and skill. M.T.Bs., it has to be remembered, are wooden vessels with no protection and sides little thicker than stout cardboard.

By February, 1945, the losses inflicted upon the enemy's shipping had been so severe that suitable targets for the British and American light coastal craft were not easy to find. However, on one dark night, with fine weather and good visibility, two P.T. boats of the United States Navy, with H.M. M.T.B. 422 (Sub-Lieutenant G. H. Bullwinkle, R.N.V.R.), had been ordered to patrol close inshore between Genoa and Savona. Enemy vessels making for the latter port were sighted at about 9 p.m. At about 9.11 the P.Ts. fired torpedoes, M.T.B. 422 reserving hers and steering on towards the coast to get in to close range.

As Bullwinkle wrote: "While on this course we heard one of the enemy ships using her siren preparatory to entering the harbour of Savona, completely oblivious to our presence. A few seconds later two of the American torpedoes were seen to hit the first of the enemy ships, the flash lighting up the harbour wall and two small merchant ships astern of the first. . . . About a minute after the American torpedoes had hit, the first star-shell was fired from the shore. . . ."

However, the star-shell was badly placed and failed to light up M.T.B. 422, which continued to close, and at 9.14 Bullwinkle fired torpedoes at the second ship in the enemy's line.

The conditions were so good that the tracks could be followed for most of their run. Both hit the target, one forward and the other aft, to cause large explosions and columns of smoke. A fraction of a second later there was a third explosion, which "threw a column of smoke several hundreds of feet into the air and the target completely disappeared. Immediately after this very heavy fire was opened from the shore, consisting of well-placed star-shell, a great deal of light fire, principally 20-mm. and 40-mm., and a considerable number of heavier shells, the majority of which burst low in the air close at hand. Searchlights were used and could be seen sweeping the area to seaward of the harbour."

M.T.B. 422 retired seaward at full speed and rejoined her American consorts, none of them having sustained any damage or casualties. Two enemy ships had been sunk on his very doorstep.

The operations of the light coastal craft between September, 1944, and March, 1945, had resulted in the loss of thirty-four enemy vessels, with a further six probably sunk and another ten damaged. The Germans had made every effort to counter this by laying defensive minefields, by erecting coastal batteries which could fire on our small craft with uncomfortable accuracy at 18,000 yards, and by rearming each of their F-lighters with two 88-mm. and several 40-mm. and 20-mm. guns. However, the persistence, resource and gallantry of the young officers and men of the light coastal forces won the battle for the control of the inshore shipping lanes. Though in the period mentioned there were no fewer than forty-two close-range actions at night, we lost only one craft, a P.T. boat which was returning early to port after a breakdown, and was believed to have struck a mine. Casualties, too, were remarkably light.

Many of the successes were attributable to the good co-operation between the British and American mixed patrols. Over one period they were out on twenty-one nights in ideal weather, during which seventeen enemy vessels were sunk and five more were damaged or possibly sunk. Minesweeping M.Ls. swept for mines under the very muzzles of the enemy's

## UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

shore guns. M.T.Bs. and P.Ts. engaged targets less than 200 yards offshore. One patrol closed within a mile of Genoa harbour to report "intense dockyard activity accompanied by explosions," which were probably caused by enemy demolitions before withdrawal. On another occasion two P.T. boats between Spezia and Rapallo attacked six F-lighters and two escorts while the convoy was entering Rapallo Harbour. "Four torpedoes fired. Two F-lighters blew up with big explosions. Third was less spectacular."

In a report made in April, 1945, by Commander R. A. Allan, R.N.V.R., who was in operational command of the light coastal forces based upon Leghorn, he mentioned all these things, and paid a particular tribute to the 7th M.T.B. Flotilla of the Royal Navy, which had been outstanding in the fighting in the Gulf of Genoa for nine months. In the 122 operational patrols carried out by their flotilla, there had been forty actions in which thirty-one enemy ships were sunk and another thirteen probably sunk or damaged.

On the occasion of the transfer of a squadron of P.T. boats of the United States Navy to another sphere of activity, the following correspondence passed between Commander Allan and the American commander of the P.Ts., Lieutenant-Commander R. J. Dressling, U.S.N.:

"The transfer of your squadron severs an association with American P.T. Squadrons which I, continuously, and various British coastal force flotillas intermittently, have enjoyed for a period of just over two years.

"It is quite impossible to express the value, friendship, and enjoyment which we have all, without exception, derived from this period of close co-operation. The loyalty and understanding, both personal and national, which has always been shown by P.T. officers and men has been outstanding, and deeply appreciated by all those who conducted their operations from the far-off difficult days of Bone to the present triumphant ones here.

"If I refer to P.Ts. in general rather than your squadron in particular, it is only because, as is well known by us all, you



have fully maintained the high standard of efficiency and friendly co-operation which was set by your predecessors.

"We will sadly miss you as keen and inspiring allies; but we all hope we shall not lose you as friends. The very best of luck to every one of your officers and men, and thank you."

Lieutenant-Commander Dressling replied:

"Your letter was received with a deep feeling of pride by this command. It has been a grand privilege to serve under your orders. Your willing co-ordination of our ideas with yours has resulted in highly efficient and successful operations against the enemy.

"The personal friendship that has been formed between my officers and yours is something that will last for many years, to inevitably be renewed again in civilian life as both our nations continue to be drawn closer together in international affairs and business.

"The officers and men of the M.T.Bs., with their excellent experience in coastal craft, have given my personnel many valuable lessons which we shall carry with us in our future operations here and later in the Pacific. The very best wishes to you, your officers and men."

## II

From January, 1945, until May 2nd, which saw the unconditional surrender of all the German forces in Italy, units of the Allied Navies continued to bombard enemy batteries and positions on the right flank of the Army on the Riviera, as well as in support of the 5th Army in the Massa area until the advance to Spezia and Genoa. An advanced naval port party reached Genoa on April 27th, to find the entrance blocked and the inner harbour and approaches heavily mined, though many of the jetties were undamaged with cranes and gantries still standing. Further south, on the same date, minesweepers were busily engaged in clearing an inshore channel from Viareggio to the Gulf of Spezia, and on to the north-westward towards Genoa. Within a week good progress was being made with

cutting a channel through the blockships and minesweeping in the approaches, while there were upwards of twelve berths available for shipping as soon as the port was opened. Further west, the smaller port of Oneglia and Porto Maurizio were virtually intact and would soon be fit for use.

One coastal bombardment is very like another, but among the British ships engaged from time to time during these four months were the destroyers *Lookout*, *Matchless*, *Meteor*, *Milne*, *Musketeer* and *Marne*, with the cruiser *Orion*, which fired upon shipping in the harbour of San Remo several times during April.

The French ships bombarding during the same period included the cruisers *Jeanne D'Arc*, *Emile Bertin*, *Montcalm*, *Duguay Trouin*, *Georges Leygues*, *Gloire* and the destroyers *L'Alcyon*, *Le Fortuné*, *Trombe*, *Tempête*, *Basque*, *Simoun* and *Tigre*, while valuable assistance was given, among others, by the United States destroyers *Woolsey*, *Benson*, *Boyle*, *Parker*, *McLanahan* and *Kendrick*.

As showing the effect of these bombardments from the sea, we may cite the work of the *Marne* and *Lookout* during the operations of the American 5th Army around Massa, south-east of Spezia.

The duty of these two ships was to act as a deterrent to enemy reinforcements being brought south along the coast roads, and to bombard in support of the American advance. In so doing they carried out eighteen bombardments in five days, some with air and others with ground observation, the latter always difficult because of the lie of the land and the limited areas into which the ships could shoot. In all, the *Marne* and *Lookout* fired 1,110 rounds of 4.7-inch shell, or a total of 31 tons, in the five days of fighting, engaging guns, troops and tank concentrations, mortars, observation posts and strong-points. Reports in the results included such remarks as: "Against guns firing, 30 rounds. Guns neutralized." "At troops concentration, 88 rounds. Area well covered." "At observation post, 169 rounds. Hits on target." "At gun battery, 66 rounds. Most successful."

The air-spotters were very pleased with the meticulous accuracy of the naval gunfire, which provided a valuable addition to that of the ground artillery, while the 5th Army authorities were convinced that the *Marne* and *Lookout* successfully fulfilled their primary function in preventing the enemy from using the coastal roads for reinforcement as he had done on previous occasions.

One break in the monotony of eternal patrolling by night and bombarding by day came on the night of March 17th-18th, when the *Meteor* (Lieutenant-Commander R. D. H. Pankhurst) and *Lookout* (Lieutenant-Commander D. H. F. Hetherington), with the *Tempête* (Capitaine de Frégate Morazzani) and *Basque* (Capitaine de Corvette Jourdan), were patrolling several miles to the westward of Cape Corse, the northernmost point of Corsica.

The night was calm, and by midnight the new crescent moon had set behind dark clouds. At 2 a.m. news was suddenly received that three enemy warships were at sea and somewhere near Cape Corse. They had been located by radar. There was a possibility they had been laying mines on the route used by our shipping to the south of France. What was more important was that the enemy was about seventy miles from his nearest bases at Genoa and Spezia. There was a reasonable chance that he might be cut off before reaching the protection of his minefields and coastal batteries.

Without waiting for further orders, the *Meteor* and *Lookout* cracked on to full speed and steered off to the north-eastward. The *Lookout*, which was nearest, steered directly towards the enemy, while the *Meteor*, considerably to the westward, headed to cut him off if he retired north. The *Tempête* and *Basque*, further west still, moved to cover a convoy in the neighbourhood and later joined in the chase.

One can imagine the scene on board those ships at the prospect of action: the men in the engine- and boiler-rooms using every effort and artifice to obey the sudden call for full speed; the watch below tumbling out of their hammocks at the shrill call of the alarm bells for "Action stations"; the gun and

torpedo-tubes' crews mustering round their weapons and making them ready; the magazine and shell-room parties at their stations; the personnel in the plotting-room checking the relative positions of our own ships and the enemy; and on the bridges, swept by the rush of wind caused by the speed through the calm night, the captains and officers listening for the radar reports and peering out through the darkness for the first glimpse of black shapes with their glimmering wakes and bow waves. After days and weeks of dreary patrolling, it was wildly exhilarating.

The *Lookout* was alone. Her captain, Hetherington, knew there were three enemy vessels and that the odds were against him. But every minute was important if the Germans were to be intercepted. He did not wait for the *Meteor* to join, and did not hesitate. He went in to attack.

Time passed. Half an hour . . . forty-five minutes. Then, at two minutes past 3 a.m. the enemy was sighted—three ships in line ahead steaming at high speed for their bases, and seemingly oblivious to any prospect of trouble. Sweeping down upon them, the *Lookout* opened up a heavy fire at point-blank range with all the weapons that would bear, and fired torpedoes when the sights came on. The first few salvos brought an ill-directed and confused reply from the enemy, though as the action proceeded it became accurate enough, the *Lookout* frequently steaming through the splashes of falling shell.

Presently the second ship in the enemy line showed signs of distress. She swerved and came to a gradual standstill, with tongues of flame and dense clouds of smoke from fires raging between decks. Her crew abandoned ship, throwing rafts into the sea and themselves after them. The other enemy ships, repeatedly hit, made off to the northward at top speed, firing wildly back as they strove to escape. The *Lookout* continued the chase. In spite of the fire that had been poured upon her, she was entirely undamaged.

The *Meteor*, meanwhile, which had been steering further to the northward at full speed to cut off the line of retreat, made

contact with the enemy at 3.52 a.m. some thirteen miles to the northward of where the third vessel had hauled out of the line of fire. Closing in, Pankhurst poured some devastating salvoes and fired torpedoes, one of which got home to detonate in a pillar of flame and smoke on the second ship in the enemy line, which finished her. The solitary survivor fled at her utmost speed and managed to escape.

The *Meteor* rescued 120 men from her victim, mostly Germans. When daylight came no trace could be seen of the *Lookout's* opponent, though 125 of her survivors were later rescued from rafts by coastal craft sent out to the scene of the action. Both the vessels sunk were ex-Italian destroyers of about 1,000 tons which had been taken over by the Germans. The solitary survivor was the ex-Yugoslav destroyer *Dubrovnik*, which had also been seized by the enemy.

The *Meteor* and *Lookout* were both congratulated by the Commander-in-Chief on their satisfactory night's work. Their initiative and excellent appreciation of the enemy's movements, coupled with their complete lack of hesitation in attacking superior enemy forces, all led up to a spirited and successful action which still further reduced the small number of enemy warships remaining in the ports of the Gulf of Genoa.

### III

Throughout March and April, 1945, British light coastal craft were active in the Gulf of Venice. Aware of their imminent expulsion from the northern Dalmatian islands, Fiume and Trieste, the Germans were sending convoys of F-lighters laden with stores and ammunition from Trieste to Venice. Moving only at night, they hugged the northern shore of the Gulf.

The short naval communiqués of the period gave little idea of what was really going on. We were not permitted to go into details. Thus:

"British Motor-Torpedo-Boats operating close inshore off Venice on the night of March 15th-16th met and engaged

five enemy F-lighters. Torpedoes were fired and all the enemy craft were seen to sink, one after a violent explosion."

"On the night of April 12th-13th a force of British M.T.Bs. operating in the Gulf of Venice met a convoy of seven enemy F-lighters and barges proceeding towards Trieste. Our flotilla attacked with torpedoes and five of the enemy craft were hit, blown up and sank. The enemy opened up a heavy fire, but our craft returned without damage or casualties."

When all the light coastal craft in the Mediterranean gave such useful and courageous service, it may seem rather invidious to mention particular flotillas. However, in the Adriatic in the months preceding the collapse of Germany the 28th M.T.B. Flotilla took a particularly heavy toll of enemy shipping. One of their most striking successes was that mentioned in the first of the two official communiqués just quoted.

The boats concerned were under the command of Lieutenant C. J. Jerram, R.N.V.R., in M.T.B. 406, commanded by Sub-Lieutenant J. E. H. Collins, R.N.V.R. The others were M.T.Bs. 404 (Lieutenant E. H. G. Lassen, R.N.Z.N.V.R.) and 407 (Lieutenant H. C. H. du Boulay, R.N.V.R.).

The weather was calm with no breeze or swell when they reached their patrol station after nightfall. There was no moon; but the absence of haze gave fair visibility. Nothing happened until 10.30 p.m., when the unit became aware of ships inshore moving westward at slow speed. Our boats followed at the same speed to make sure of the situation before going in to attack. There was much phosphorescence in the water, and Jerram did not wish to be sighted by the luminous wash of wakes and bow waves. However, after about an hour he decided that he was not overhauling the enemy fast enough, so accepted the risk, increased to fourteen knots, and gave orders to his craft to stand by their guns as well as their torpedoes.

The attack started with 406 firing a torpedo at what was recognized as an F-lighter. Almost at once more F-lighters were seen astern of the first in close formation. Lassen, in 404, fired at the second and third. Jerram and Collins, in 406, finished off the proceedings by torpedoing the last of the enemy line.

Our boats turned away to disengage. "Almost simultaneously," as Jerram wrote, "there were six explosions, starting with the leading lighter. Columns of smoke and water shot about 200 feet in the air." Only one enemy shell burst anywhere near, and it did no damage.

The engagement was over in a matter of a few minutes, and a little later, when Jerram had stopped to watch any further proceedings, "there was a large and violent explosion from the direction of the scene of action. I consider this was the last F-lighter blowing up."

Five F-lighters had been destroyed at the enemy's front door. As the Senior Naval Officer, Northern Adriatic, wrote, this was "an excellent evening's work which had to be done quickly, as the enemy might have slipped into the shelter of the Venice Harbour defences."

There was another such engagement in the same area on the night of April 16th-17th, when two more F-lighters were sunk and another damaged, while on the same night a British M.T.B. with some light coastal craft of the Yugoslav Navy operating off the coast of Istria, south of the Gulf of Trieste, met a southbound convoy of F-lighters and barges escorted by R-boats. The M.T.B. attacked with torpedoes, and an F-lighter was hit and exploded in a column of flame and smoke. Then the Yugoslav craft went in to engage with gunfire, causing such damage to one R-boat that she probably sank later. They also engaged an F-lighter and a supply barge, which opened up a heavy return fire, which caused slight damage and three minor casualties to one of the Yugoslav boats. It was a very spirited engagement.

The enemy's last bolt had been shot. On May 1st, the eve of the surrender of all the German forces in Italy, some thirty German vessels in company were sighted by aircraft on their way west from Trieste along the northern shore of the Gulf of Venice. Lieutenant-Commander T. J. Bligh, R.N.V.R., whose name has so frequently appeared in these pages in connection with M.T.B. operations in the Adriatic, sailed to locate them with M.T.Bs. 634, 651 and 670. Though in doubt

#### UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

if the Germans were prepared to fight, Bligh closed the convoy and eventually negotiated the surrender of fifteen vessels. The others were beached by their crews. The fifteen, which included five F-lighters, reached Ancona on May 3rd and 4th, together with seven E-boats from Pola carrying 500 German naval personnel, including Captain Wupperman, senior officer of the E-boats in the Adriatic.

By May 5th more than twenty enemy vessels had reached Ancona and were flying the White Ensign over the black swastika of Germany, and the 1,300 officers and men who had been brought over in them had become prisoners of war.

At 2 p.m. on May 2nd, at Caserta Palace, an instrument of unconditional surrender of all German forces west of the Isonzo River had been signed by representatives of General Von Vietinghoff, the German commander in Italy.

#### IV

On the night of May 1st-2nd, in the Ægean, raiding forces were landed on Rhodes and the small island of Alimnia to the westward, the operation being supported by the British destroyers *Kimberley* and *Catterick* and the Greek destroyer *Crete*. At Rhodes three enemy gun positions were eliminated by the raiders, while a fourth was bombarded by the *Catterick* for half an hour. Ammunition, vehicles, stores, huts and tents were all destroyed, and at Alimnia one small enemy vessel, landing jetties and stores were either blown up or set on fire. In these two little operations the Germans had at least thirty killed, while more than fifty were made prisoners of war.

These were probably the last shots fired by the Royal Navy in the Ægean during the war. There were enemy garrisons in Crete, Rhodes, Leros, Kos, Milos and various of the small islands. Crete had already partly been occupied by the Allies; but on May 9th advanced Allied forces were landed on all the other islands, and the German garrisons, amounting in all to about 20,000 men, laid down their arms in surrender.



## V

Though the fighting was over, the task of the Allied Navies in the Mediterranean was by no means finished. There still remained the work of supplying the Army, of reverting from a war to a peacetime status, and of shutting down a hundred and one naval shore establishments which had become superfluous. Moreover, so far as the Royal Navy was concerned, all the available ships and personnel were required for the war against Japan. One of the major naval tasks was the gradual clearance of our own and the enemy's minefields.

With the opening of a channel to Venice by the third week in May, 1945, every port in the Mediterranean was available to shipping. This was not to say that all the thickly laid minefields in the Gulf of Genoa, the Adriatic and the Ægean had been fully cleared, but that channels had been swept and buoyed, and that for the time ships had to keep strictly to them. With the profusion of moored, magnetic and acoustic mines laid by the enemy in all the most important areas and approaches, not to mention the German explosive and static anti-sweeping devices and the many thousands of other mines laid by Allied vessels and aircraft, the final clearance of great stretches of navigable water in the Mediterranean was to take months of patient and arduous work. Each and every type of mine required its own separate method of sweeping, and its own particular type of minesweeper.

How great was the Axis minelaying effort can be deduced from the fact that they laid a total of 55,000 mines in the Central Mediterranean alone, of which some 6,000 had been swept by Allied minesweepers or washed ashore by V.E.-day. More than 17,000 mines were laid by the enemy off Cape Bon and in the Sicilian Straits, and another 1,900 off Malta, for the dual purpose of preventing our convoys from reaching that beleaguered island, and of preventing our warships from interfering with the enemy convoys carrying supplies to the Axis army in North Africa. There were other heavy concentrations on the west coast of Italy between Civitavecchia and San Remo,

where 12,000 mines had been laid, with another 14,000 in the Adriatic roughly north of the line joining Rimini and Zadar. There were also extensive fields off the south of France and in the Ægean. Of the number of Allied mines which had to be cleared I have no record.

As a point of interest it may be mentioned that five separate forces of minesweepers were employed on the post-V.E.-day sweeping in the Mediterranean. Of the number of United States sweepers used for this work I again have no record, but the total comprised 185 British, eighteen Greek and some thirty-five French minesweepers, manned by about 9,000 officers and men. They included fleet sweepers, minesweeping trawlers, motor minesweepers, American-built "yard" minesweepers and minesweeping motor launches, together with a few shallow-draft craft of a special type designed for sweeping harbours, canals and rivers.

And so, as the minesweepers had preceded and cleared the way for the assault and covering forces during the landings in North Africa, Sicily, Salerno, Anzio, Elba and the South of France, in Greece and in many other operations, they also saw the last of the war in the Mediterranean.

## VI

On May 2nd came Field-Marshal Sir Harold Alexander's Special Order of the Day to the soldiers, sailors and airmen of the Allied Forces in the Mediterranean Theatre:

"After nearly two years of hard and continuous fighting, which started in Sicily in the summer of 1943, you stand to-day as the victors of the Italian campaign.

"You have won a victory which has ended in the complete and utter rout of the German armed forces in the Mediterranean. By clearing Italy of the last Nazi aggressor, you have liberated a country of over 40,000,000 people.

"To-day the remnants of a once proud Army have laid down their arms to you—close on a million men with all their arms, equipment and impedimenta.

"You may well be proud of this great and victorious

campaign which will long live in history as one of the greatest and most successful ever waged.

"No praise is high enough for you sailors, soldiers, airmen and workers of the united forces in Italy for your magnificent triumph.

"My gratitude to you and my admiration is unbounded and only equalled by the pride which is mine in being your Commander-in-Chief."

On May 3rd, Admiral Sir John Cunningham, Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, promulgated a Special Order of the Day to the Allied Fleets:

"To all men and women of the Allied Fleets and the Merchant Navies in the Mediterranean Theatre, I send my hearty congratulations upon the great contribution you have made in conjunction with your comrades in all the seas of the world toward the surrender of the enemy in Italy. You have totally destroyed the enemy's sea forces in the Mediterranean, and through nearly six years of war against a powerful and unscrupulous enemy you have successfully transported, supported and sustained the land and air forces which have now achieved so glorious a victory. Close co-operation between all ranks and services has alone made this great victory possible. In complete confidence that this team-work will continue and enable us to complete our task—the total defeat of *all* our enemies in the shortest possible time—I send you my thanks for your past service and my good wishes for your continued success."

FROM ADMIRALTY TO COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, MEDITERRANEAN  
*May 3rd, 1945*

"The unconditional surrender of the enemy's forces in Italy brings to an end a historic series of campaigns in which the British and Allied Navies have played an indispensable part. Their Lordships congratulate you and all the officers and men under your command upon an achievement which will live in the annals of the Royal Navy and of which the end was worthy of a great beginning."

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